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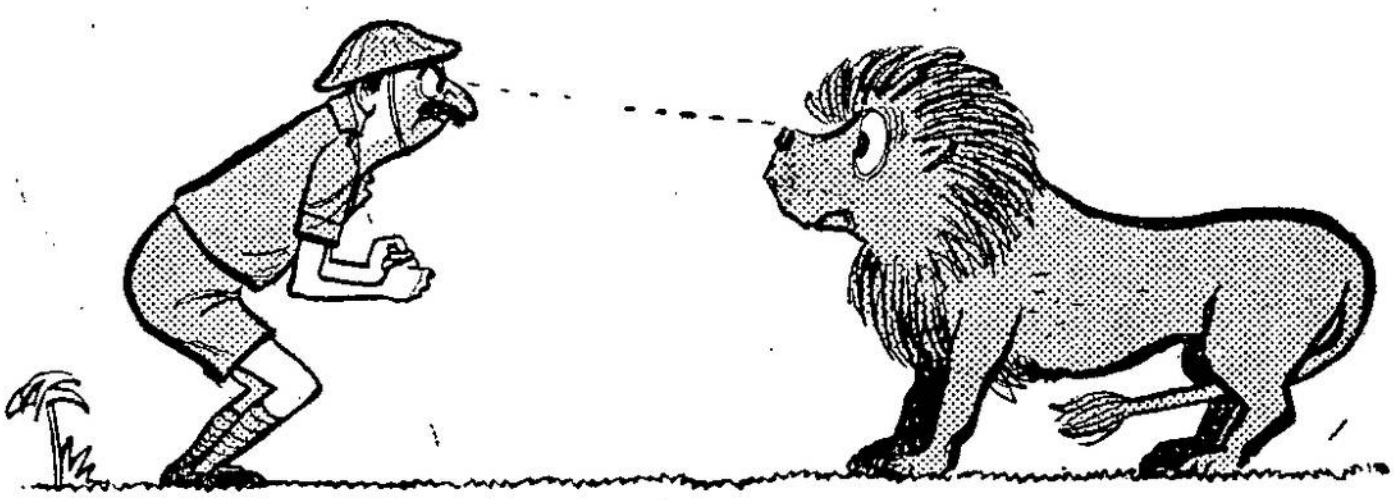

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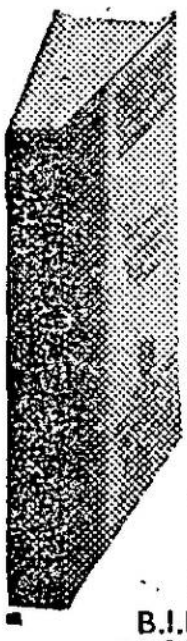

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ARGOSY

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Log Book

TRAVEL abroad would be so wonderful, with the exotic foods and the splendid scenery, and so forth, if only all those people in foreign countries could speak English. Many of them can't even speak French, which seems the crowning insult; la plume de ma tante is as remote to them as the pen that signed Magna Carta. There is nothing for the voyager to do but set forth equipped with a phrase-book and optimism—unless, indeed, he decides to stay at home with his imagination and Argosy.

However let us follow the fortunes of the first kind of traveller, stepping timorously out of the plane and keeping a tight clutch on *Make Yourself at Home in Argentina.* All goes well at first and with the utmost politeness: I am at your disposal to help you; I appreciate it very much.

Our traveller first encounters difficulties over the food, for his phrase-book expects him to be insular and demands: Bring me sausage, thick soup, clear soup, fried sole, chop, leg of mutton, boiled potatoes. The natives shake their heads uncomprehendingly, though you would think they ought to know about a leg of mutton. Very well: he embarks on something called, according to his pronunciation rules, o-l'yah po-dree-dah.

" This is cooked too much; not done enough; not fresh," he exclaims in anguish. Next—and who can wonder?—he is saying, " Fetch a doctor. I feel a pain—here. I want—I do not want: this tooth extracted." We may pardon his hesitation; who knows what the satanic foreigners will do once they get him down?

He recovers, and evidently falls in love, for next we find him saying, " I want some roses, violets, carnations, primroses, lilies of the valley." *Primroses* in the *Argentine*? " Let us go to the races, an amusement park," he says to his inamorata, but the town has nothing of the sort to offer and he has to make do with

a Punch and Judy show (representación de guiño). Never mind: by the end of it he is muttering, " The south, to the south, from the south! The moon, the sky, the stars! Tomorrow night! (Mahn'yah'nah pohr lah noh'cheh)," he breathes heavily.

Opposition rears its head—" Never, never! " A jealous rival appears—" Who is knocking? " and the fickle Conchita veers round—" He is drunk." There is a fight, ending with the ominous phrases, " More dead than alive; call a policeman."

With his last breath our poor brave traveller stammers, " Take me to the airport," and is removed, presumably on a stretcher. Thank heaven he has a copy of Argosy in his pocket to beguile the long hours of agony on the plane.

And so we say, Good-bye to the colourful slopes of the Andes . . .

Wolf Mankowitz seems to have crammed more experience into his thirty-two years than most people have into double that time. Married at nineteen, he's the father of three, a world authority on Wedgwood china (he runs an antique shop near Piccadilly), and author of a batch of best-selling novels, of which *Make Me an Offer* and *A Kid for Two Farthings* have already been successfully filmed, as has also his play *The Bespoke Overcoat*. *A Kid for Two Farthings*, by the way, originally appeared in Argosy. Mankowitz has also written a collection of short stories,

Unlimited Company. Writing a book, he says, is like digging a hole in a road—much depends on your tools and your time. He himself hasn't much time but he recently found enough to write another bestseller, *My Old Man's a Dustman*.

" **Bartimeus** " is the pen-name of Captain Sir Lewis Anselmo Ritchie, C.B.E., who has written many well-loved sea stories—*Naval Occasions*, *A Tall Ship*, for example. After serving with the Royal Navy for forty years he retired in 1944.

Morris L. West, Australian-born, has spent twelve years as a member of a monastic teaching order, served as a cryptographer during the war. He formed his own radio production and recording company in Australia, and has directed a Sydney theatre. Among his works are: *Moon in My Pocket*, *Gallows in the Sand:* and *Children of the Sun*, also set in Naples.

Clifford Simak is a pioneer among science-fiction writers. His stories have appeared in all the leading sf magazines, his book *City* won the International Fantasy Award for 1953. Other books of his are *Time and Again*, *Ring Around the Sun*. JOHN SILVER

AWAKE TO DANGER

Opening her eyes, she saw him spread-eagled against the cliff above

BY MARK DERBY

ALL the way across Europe and Asia Mrs. Pendleton had chattered to Sara. Now, five minutes after their arrival at Singapore Airport, she was chattering about her to the patient husband who'd come to meet her.

"I must just see if Miss Gardiner is all right," the tireless voice rattled behind Sara. "Such a charming girl, quite lovely, but a terribly sad first trip East for her. Her only sister, married to a planter up in Perak, killed in an accident last week. There's a little boy, only three, so Miss Gardiner's come out to take him to England. She doesn't even know how her sister died, a fall of some kind . . ."

But Sara had said good-bye already to Mrs. Pendleton and meant it to be final. She dodged behind a bookstall and, scanning the group waiting by the customs barrier, looked for her brother-in-law. She had never met Alex Kendry, and her sister's snaps hadn't given her much idea of his looks. But the tall man whose eyes lighted in recognition as soon as he spotted her seemed too slim and too young.

"Miss Gardiner?"

"Yes." She blinked in the sun-glare. "Alex?"

"No. My name's Rob O'Neill."

"I remember. You're the assistant at Batu Monyet."

"Not any longer." He was staring at her with his quiet grey eyes, fascinated. "You're wonderfully like Julie," he said.

She said, "People often think we're twins. I mean," she added unhappily, "they used to." More brightly, she said, "It's kind of you to meet me."

"Only unofficially." He was gazing down at her red-black hair and chestnut eyes. "I had to be in Singapore today and I knew Kendry wasn't coming down, so—"

"He isn't here?"

"No. Didn't you get his letter?"

Before she could answer, the air hostess came up to hand her an envelope addressed in the same bony handwriting as the short letter that had brought her the news of Julie's death. Briefly Alex Kendry regretted being unable to meet her because he was temporarily without an assistant, but he enclosed a reservation for the Malayan Airways plane to Ipoh that would leave Singapore an hour later.

As she refolded the note, Rob O'Neill said, " Let's check your reservation to Ipoh, then we can wait for a while in the restaurant."

She liked him. He was quiet and there was a steadiness about him that was reassuring in her distress and her newness to everything in this far country. Over a long drink in the restaurant she said, " I'm sorry you aren't at Batu Monyet any more. Julie often mentioned you in her letters. She called you Uncle Rob."

" It's what young Pip calls me. He's a fine kid—you're going to like him a lot."

Her eyes were suddenly full of tears. " I hope his father will let me take him back with me. So far I've had nothing but his short letter telling me we'd lost Julie. I booked on the first plane I could get. Our uncle in Canada left Julie and me all his money last month, you see, so the expense was nothing."

" Yes, Julie told me about the money she'd come into," he said slowly, his eyes turning aside for a moment. " I'm sure Kendry will be glad for you to take Pip back. He'd already started arranging for him to be taken to England when your cable arrived. He never expected you to come out."

It was surprising how quickly she felt she knew him. Already she knew him well enough to guess that he was telling her only a little of what was in his mind. He looked more deeply into her eyes and he said again, " You're wonderfully like Julie."

Sara said, " She liked you, I know."

For a moment he searched for words. Then, " I thought the world of her," he said. " For me she was everything that was wonderful. An ideal . . . "

She was thinking, he likes me, too; because I'm like Julie. She was strangely confused under his penetrating stare and asked him, " Have you got another job? "

He told her, " Yes. Twelve miles up the road from Batu Monyet."

" Then we'll be meeting again, I expect," she said.

He frowned doubtfully. " I had a row with Kendry and cleared out."

When the loud speaker warned her to join the Ipoh plane he looked deep into her eyes again and said a strange thing. " I want you to remember a phone number. It's an easy one—

Riawan 234. If ever you want to see me or . . . need any help, just call Riawan 234. I'll be there from tomorrow night."

She said, " I'll remember."

" Please," he said. " Please remember."

And I like him, she was thinking . . .

Alex Kendry met her at Ipoh and led her to a new station-wagon.

" Hope you were all right in Singapore, Sara," he said, blinking very dark eyes. " I had to fire my assistant yesterday, so I couldn't very well leave the estate."

" I was quite all right," Sara said, and that was all she said. She didn't mention that Rob O'Neill had met her, nor that he'd said he had thrown up the job and not been fired. She didn't know why she kept silent.

Kendry was a handsome man of forty, with a lazy smile and a heavy, muscular body. When she took her seat beside him she saw the carbine stowed between them and the armed Malay special constable in a back seat.

" Don't let the firearms scare you," Kendry said easily as they moved off. " No terrorism in our area for months."

All the way out to Batu Monyet Sara was staring round her, half recognizing the sun-gilded landscapes from Julie's long letters, the jungle-covered hills, the limestone cliffs and crags, the caves turned into Chinese temples, the regimented regularity of rubber plantations, the rich greenness everywhere. They were climbing steeply when he said at last, " There you are. Batu Monyet."

Sara gazed up at the manager's bungalow with apprehension, because she had a horror of heights and knew all about its clifftop position, chosen because from the verandah the whole of the big estate could be seen. Her eyes blinked up to the top of the precipitous Batu Monyet, or Monkey Rock, and glimpsed white walls, a red roof, and albizzia shade trees; but what caught her breath was the tiny hut on a narrow ledge twenty feet from the clifftop, and the frail rope-ladder that led to it down the precipice.

" That terrible flimsy ladder! " she exclaimed. " Why, surely not even a monkey would be safe on it."

" Odd you should say that," Kendry answered. " The guards who manned that sentry-hut when the terrorists were still round here called it the monkey-ladder. Used to run up and down it."

Sara shuddered and said, " It's a dangerous house for a small boy. Sheer drops on three sides."

" Yes. Just as well he's leaving."

His handsome profile was expressionless.

"You do agree it's best for me to take him?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh, sure," he said easily. "But, Sara, there was no need for you to come all the way out here to fetch him. I could easily have found somebody to look after him on the flight to England."

As they ended the tortuous climb up to the bungalow Pip was on the verandah. His round brown face and round blue eyes turned blank with shock for a moment, then went wild with joy. "*Mummy!*" he cried out, and ran headlong into Sara's arms.

"Never thought of that," his father said shortly, above the boy's sobs. "You're terribly like Julie, of course."

Terribly. Rob O'Neill had said *wonderfully*. Twice.

She stayed with Pip for an hour, helping the smiling Chinese amah give him his supper, walking with him through the garden in the purple sunset, bathing him, putting him to bed, and hearing him say his prayers. He still asked God to bless Mummy, and Uncle Rob, too . . .

Later, on the verandah with drinks, looking out into the darkness that was loud with the strumming of cicadas, Sara said, "Alex, I don't even know how Julie died. A fall, you said in your letter."

He put down his glass. "She was walking in her sleep."

Sara caught her breath. When she'd remarked that the clifftop bungalow was a dangerous home for a small boy she'd thought, too, of Julie's sleepwalking and the special danger Batu Monyet would have held for her. "But, Alex, how frightful! She broke her arm once, sleepwalking through a window. Where did she fall?"

His face was dark. "You saw the monkey-ladder . . ."

"Not down there!" Sara cried out in horror. "Oh, but she must have been *terrified* of it. I know, because it wasn't only in looks that we were alike. We both had a horror of heights and we both sleepwalked if we were desperately worried. She must have been half dead with worry to dreamwalk down there."

He said, "Oh, I don't think she had anything to worry her."

"She must have." Sara faced him tensely. "That time she fell from her bedroom window and broke her arm they thought I was dying in hospital. And I knew from her letters lately how unhappy she was."

"Oh?" Alex Kendry was strangely still. "What did she say?"

"She never said anything. I could read it between the lines."

He took up his drink again. "I think you're wrong," he said.

On the point of persisting, she checked herself and made an abrupt change of subject. "Could I have the car tomorrow?"

she asked him. " I'd like to lay a few flowers on her grave . . . "

When the car climbed the hill back to Batu Monyet after she had stood by Julie's grave, Sara closed her eyes so as not to see the cliff and the giddy rope-ladder from which Julie had plunged eighty feet onto the rocks. Already she hated this place. She wished she could take Pip away now, but their reservations were for five days later because she'd wanted to give him time to know her a little before she took him away from his father and his home.

The telephone bell rang as she climbed the verandah steps and on her way to her room she heard a voice snap, " Kendry here." A second later she stopped dead. In a lowered voice Kendry had said impatiently, " But, darling, I said *not* this number this week . . . "

In the half-light of her shutter-shaded room Sara stood tensely, shaken and bewildered. Alex Kendry wasn't one of the sophisticated set who called everybody darling. For men of his type the word darling had a single meaning and was reserved for a single relationship. She covered her face with her hands, sick under the oppression of ugly suspicions. It was several minutes before she roused herself, with a deep sigh, to shower and change to be ready for Pip when he woke from his siesta.

That was mid afternoon. She didn't see Alex Kendry until shortly before dinner. Most of that time she was with Pip, and his noisy high spirits forced the shock and suspicion into the background of her mind. When she joined Kendry for sherry on the verandah she asked him questions about the estate and the workers. She wanted to ask about Julie's last days and her accident; but she was afraid of his answers now.

Over coffee after dinner, though, he turned the conversation back to Julie, indirectly. " By the way, Julie left you her bits of jewellery, Sara. We made wills after our honeymoon, leaving everything to each other, but she wanted you to have her little box of trinkets if anything happened."

For the first time Sara remembered Julie's money. It was only a few weeks since their Uncle Edward, whom they'd never seen, had died in Canada and, to their amazement, left them his fortune, over $80,000 of it. Sara still found it difficult to realize that now she was somebody with money in the bank, and to that moment she'd never thought to wonder who would get Julie's money.

Because of Julie's death Alex Kendry was £15,000 better off.

She shook her head and sighed. " I can't stop wondering what it was preying on Julie's mind that drove her dreamwalking down that ghastly rope-ladder."

He poured himself a large whisky. " I was away that night,

but when I left in the afternoon she didn't seem at all worried."

" But from her letters I'm sure she was; and her sleepwalking proves it. It must have been something quite desperate."

He jumped suddenly to his feet, turned his back on her, and stood staring over the verandah rail into the darkness below.

" Actually," he said after a moment, " we can't be sure she sleepwalked. She may have . . . thrown herself over the cliff."

It was as if his words had drawn the mercury down the thermometer tube and frozen the thick, still air. Sara held her breath, and he went on, still with his back to her, " I suppose I'd better tell you, after all, since you're convinced there was something wrong anyway. You see, Sara, the truth is that Julie wasn't the perfect wife you imagine."

She was breathless. " What do you mean? "

" The assistant here, a fellow called O'Neill, was Julie's own age. Good-looking, lazy, a lady's man, made a fuss of the kid, always drinking and laughing with Julie till all hours while I struggled with accounts and correspondence. I still don't know how long it had been going on— "

She was out of her chair, standing rigid at the verandah rail, her chestnut eyes blazing. " You must be mad! Why tell me a story you know is a lie and I know is a lie? "

" I don't say Julie was happy about it," he said, his lazy eyes turning to meet hers steadily. " In fact, we know now how unhappy it must have made her. Not all her fault, mind you; that fellow O'Neill was a snake."

" Lies! " she exclaimed, quietly intense. " If Julie was unhappy it might have been because she overheard you speaking on the telephone."

His face darkened. " What d'you mean? "

" I overheard you myself this afternoon." For a moment longer she met his glance and saw it flicker, then she turned and hurried to her room and locked the door with shaking fingers.

She waited until she heard him drive off down the track to the assistant's bungalow, half a mile away, where he was sleeping during her visit. Then she unlocked her door, ran to the telephone, and called Riawan 234.

" Mr. O'Neill hasn't arrived yet," a friendly voice answered. " He'll be here before midnight, though. Shall I give him a message? "

" Please. Just say Miss Gardiner called him. Urgently."

" As soon as he comes in. Good night."

She undressed, showered, and put on her nightdress. She longed for sleep. On the plane she'd been unable to sleep and

last night thoughts of Julie had kept her awake. But she lay staring into the hot darkness, feeling desperately alone, obsessed by the mystery of Julie's last hours.

At last she slept for a while, but woke when a car came climbing the road below the bungalow. She opened a louvered wooden window and watched the car follow the blinding glare of its headlights up the dark road until it passed out of sight and sound behind a cliff. It could be Rob O'Neill, she thought, and soon she lay listening tensely for the phone bell. But it never rang and sleep drew her down into blackness again.

Almost at once she was dreaming. A bad dream, plunging her back into the anxiety that tormented her.

In her dream she saw the bungalow in starlight and a white figure coming slowly down the verandah steps. Julie. But it wasn't until Julie passed slowly under the pergola massed with jacquemontia she herself had planted that Sara realized what was happening. Julie's dress was a nightdress and she was walking in her sleep.

Sara knew so well, so agonizingly, the sick suspense of that walking dream. She was sobbing in her own dream, her heart aching for Julie. But suddenly she stopped sobbing, stopped breathing. She had seen which way Julie was walking.

Julie was walking to the cliff edge, a soft night breeze riffling her nightdress, her tranced eyes open. Unlatching the fence gate that kept young Pip from the cliff edge, she went straight to the head of the monkey-ladder of ropes swung from steel struts driven into the precipice. Sara saw her sister's hand grasp the post to which the rope handrail was fixed and her bare foot disappear over the cliff edge onto the top rung, made of two strands of rope. Another step down into the darkness . . . another, the rough rock tearing the right shoulder of her night-dress as she cowered against the inner side of the ladder.

In frozen horror Sara watched. If Julie woke now, balanced on two strands of rope above the black gulf, she would go mad with fear and nothing could save her from falling. She had been trying to scream, to warn her, but she was dream-dumb, and now it was too late anyway. Everything was growing fainter, her head aching and swimming, there was a sharp pain in her right shoulder . . .

A long moment of blindfold suspense and she woke shuddering from her dream. Slowly reality took form, like a newly switched-on television screen. But the pain in her shoulder persisted and there was still the dim starlight. And the ropes, and the appalling gulf of space below, clutching at her.

In the fever of her anxiety she had walked in her sleep, just as

Julie had. She was halfway down the monkey-ladder and she knew that she could never climb back up it again.

She couldn't retrace her steps, she couldn't move, she could scarcely hold on, even. Her shoulder was bleeding where the rock face had torn her nylon nightdress and the skin beneath, but she pressed herself desperately to the cliff, away from the black caves of space that sucked greedily at her from all sides but one.

The two ropes forming the step cut her bare feet and she began to sway. She was going to fall. She was going to fall. Then she thought of Pip.

Pip needed her. Pip had lost his mother. And his father . . . well, his father was no good to him. For his sake she must try the impossible.

She paused only for a swift, agonized prayer, and then she concentrated everything on an impassioned effort to turn. For a while nothing happened: not even a finger moved. Then with aching slowness her body turned and her right hand crossed over to clutch the rope-rail.

Her head swam and she closed her eyes, but when she opened them again she saw the steps climbing in front of her instead of dropping below her.

As she raised her eyes she saw the dark figure on the top step.

It never occurred to her to call to Alex Kendry for help. Already she had come to the conclusion that her dream had been false, that Julie had not sleepwalked to her death, that either because of Uncle Edward's £15,000 or because of "Darling" at the other end of a phone wire, or because of both, Julie had been thrown to death down this cliff.

And now Julie's murderer took a step down the monkey-ladder towards her.

With a sob she half turned again and struggled to force herself down the remaining steps to the sentry-hut on the narrow ledge.

But a low laugh sounded above her.

"No good, Sara, it's a dead end." Another hoarse laugh then. "Did you hear that? A dead . . . end."

Her scream was a pitiful, breathless thing, with no hope of reaching the sentry at the main gate or the sleeping servants. Alex Kendry's were the only ears that heard it. The whole ladder was shaking now from the violent trembling of her body. She crouched silently against the cliff face, beaten.

As he took another step down the ladder her thoughts stampeded and she wondered whether she would have the strength to cling to him so fiercely that if she fell through the darkness

onto the rocks he would fall with her. Pip would be alone in the world then, but surely Uncle Rob would help him. Rob O'Neill would make a wonderful father . . .

The ladder convulsed as Kendry descended another step.

" You must be a thought-reader, Sara. You guessed my little scheme for tonight and came out here to meet me! " He sighed heavily. " I never meant you any harm, but you can't risk loose ends in a plan like mine. So it's good-bye, Sara. Just close your eyes and it'll all be over in— "

The shock that choked him then was as dramatic as an earthquake. Out of the gorge into which the valley narrowed three hundred yards beyond the bungalow a car had dashed, its headlamps blazing like unmasked searchlights.

Their beam struck the pale cliff and the ladder, blinding Sara and Alex Kendry, spotlighting them like figures on a cinema screen.

For a minute Sara's mind was blank with shock. Then slowly she realized that the car had pulled up with its headlights still full on them. Opening her eyes, she saw Kendry four steps above her, spread-eagled against the cliff like a man facing a firing-squad, his mouth open and gasping, his broad chest heaving.

It seemed as if an hour went by. Her strength was ebbing out of her, like blood from a wound. Her head spun and she swayed on her numb feet.

She was going to fall . . . At the sound of racing footsteps on the garden path above she roused faintly. Kendry roused, too, and the ladder swayed and dipped as he sprang to the top with a curse.

" Sara, it's all right, it's all *right*! " Rob's shout was followed by the sounds of savage fighting. She opened her eyes and saw Kendry lunge, saw Rob spin back to the edge of the drop, and closed her eyes again.

A moment later a loud cry sent a new shock through her, a cry of naked terror that began somewhere above her and came flying past to grow fainter as it plunged far below her and ended with sickening suddenness.

She felt her hand losing its hold on the rail and she tried to say Rob's name as she felt herself swaying.

Waking slowly in her bed, Sara believed at first that it had all been a nightmare.

But the amah was bathing a sore place on her shoulder and when she opened her eyes she saw Rob O'Neill watching her with his grave, steady glance.

She began to sob, but he was down on his knee, his whisper close to her ear. " It's all over. Just trust me, Sara. It's all right now." She remembered what he'd said about Julie, how Julie had been his ideal, everything that was wonderful for him. And twice he'd said, " You're wonderfully like her . . ."

She trusted him. Yes, it was all right now.

★ ★ ★

CURTAIN UP

Something to make a song and dance about—a full house of opera and ballet teasers. On your points ! Aria right ? If not, turn to p. 102.

1. *What town are you in if you spend a night at the opera at:*
   a. the Metropolitan; b. the San Carlo; c. La Scala

2. *What ballet is based on: i. a Hogarth series; ii. an American murder case; iii. A Bab ballad; iv. music for a sequence of poems by Edith Sitwell*

3. *Most of us sing in our baths, but at what baths can you hear a whole opera?*

4. *Music, maestro, please! Who was the maestro in each of the following ballets:*
   a. Petrouchka *b. Peter and the Wolf*
   c. Les Sylphides *d. Swan Lake*

5. *Verdi wrote more than one opera on a Shakespearian theme; what were they?*

6. *Compose yourself and tell us who composed:*
   i. The Flying Dutchman *ii. Fidelio*
   iii. Dido and Aeneas *iv. Der Freischütz*
   v. The Barber of Seville

7. *And now some light fantastic trip-ups. Which word in each of the following pairs is a (technical) ballet term—and what does it mean (never mind about the other word):*

   a. enjambement, enchaînement
   b. tutu, tutoyer
   c. fouetté, foutu
   d. vol au vent, tour en l'air
   e. ventre à terre, terre à terre

8. *International singing celebrities, but what was the nationality of each: i. Melba; ii. Caruso; iii. Flagstad; iv. Jenny Lind*

CONTRAPTION

" What in the world! " Aunt Em leaned forward to look at it

BY CLIFFORD SIMAK

HE found the contraption in a blackberry patch when he was hunting for the cows. Darkness was sifting down through the tall poplar trees, and he couldn't make it out too well, and he couldn't spend much time looking at it because Uncle Eb had been furious about his missing the two heifers, and if it took too long to find them Uncle Eb would more than likely take the strap to him again, and he'd had about all he could stand for one day.

Already he'd had to go without his supper because he'd forgotten to go down to the spring for a bucket of cold water. And Aunt Em had been after him all day because he was so bad at weeding the garden.

" I never saw such a useless young 'un in all my life," she'd shrill at him, and then she'd go on to say that she'd think he'd have some gratitude for the way she and Uncle Eb had taken him in and saved him from the orphanage, but no, he never felt any gratitude, but caused all the trouble that he could, and was lazy to boot, and she declared to goodness she didn't know what would become of him.

He found the two heifers down in the corner of the pasture by the grove of walnut trees, and drove them home, plodding along behind them, thinking once again about running away, but knowing that he wouldn't, because he had no place to go. Although, he told himself, 'most any place would be better than staying here with Aunt Em and Uncle Eb, who weren't really his uncle and aunt at all, but just a couple of people who had taken him in.

Uncle Eb was just finishing milking when he came into the barn, driving the two heifers before him, and Uncle Eb was still angry about the way he'd missed them when he'd brought in the other cows.

" Here," said Uncle Eb, " I've had to milk my share and yours, too, and all because you didn't count the cows, the way I always tell you to so that you'll be sure you got them all. Just

to teach you, you can finish up by milking them there heifers."

So Johnny got his three-legged milking-stool and a pail and milked the heifers. Heifers are hard things to milk, and skittish, too, and the red one kicked, and knocked Johnny into the gutter, spilling the milk he had in the pail.

Uncle Eb, seeing this, took the strap down from behind the door and let Johnny have a few to teach him to be more careful and that milk represented money, and then made him finish his milking.

They went up to the house after that, Uncle Eb grumbling all the way about kids being more trouble than they're worth, and Aunt Em met them at the door to tell Johnny to be sure he washed his feet before he went to bed, because she didn't want him getting her nice clean sheets all dirty.

"Aunt Em," he said, "I'm awful hungry."

"Not a bite," she said, grim-lipped in the lamplight of the kitchen. "Maybe if you get a little hungry you won't go forgetting all the time."

"Just a slice of bread," said Johnny. "Without no butter or nothing. Just a slice of bread."

"Young man," said Uncle Eb, "you heard your aunt. Get them feet washed and up to bed."

"And see you wash them good," said Aunt Em.

So he washed his feet and went to bed, and, lying there, he remembered what he had seen in the blackberry patch and remembered, too, that he hadn't said a word about it because he hadn't had a chance to, what with Uncle Eb and Aunt Em going on at him all the blessed time.

And he decided right then and there he wouldn't tell them what he'd found, for if he did they'd take it away from him the way they always took everything he had. And if they didn't take it away from him, they'd spoil it so there'd be no fun or satisfaction in it.

The only thing he had that was really his was the old pocket-knife with the point broken off the little blade. There was nothing in the world he'd rather have than another knife to replace this one, but he knew better than to ask for it. Once he had, and Uncle Eb and Aunt Em had carried on for days, saying what an ungrateful, grasping thing he was, when they'd taken him in off the street, and he still wasn't satisfied but wanted them to spend good money on a pocket-knife.

Johnny worried a good deal about them saying he'd been taken in off the street, because as far as he knew he'd never been on any street.

Lying there, in his bed, looking through the window at the

stars, he began wondering what it was he'd seen in the blackberry patch. He couldn't remember it very well because he hadn't seen it clearly and there'd been no time to stop and look. But there was something funny about it, and the more he thought about it the more he wanted to have a good look at it.

Tomorrow, he thought, I'll have a good look at it. Soon as I get a chance, tomorrow.

Then he realized there'd be no chance tomorrow, for Aunt Em would have him out, right after morning chores, to weed the garden, and she'd keep an eye on him and there'd be no chance to slip away. He lay in bed and went on thinking about it, and it became as clear as day that if he wanted a look at it he'd have to go tonight.

He could tell by their snoring that Uncle Eb and Aunt Em were asleep, so he got out of bed and slipped into his shirt and dungarees and sneaked down the stairs, being careful to miss the squeaky boards. In the kitchen he climbed up on a chair to reach the box of matches on top of the warming oven of the old wood-burning stove. He took a fistful of matches, then put back all but half a dozen, because he was afraid Aunt Em would notice if he took too many.

Outside, the grass was wet and cold with dew, and he rolled up the legs of his dungarees so they wouldn't get all soaked, and set off across the pasture.

Going through the woods there were some spooky places, but he wasn't too scared, although no one could go through the woods at night without being scared a little.

Finally he got to the blackberry patch and stood there wondering how he could get through the patch in the dark without ripping his clothes and getting his bare feet full of thorns. Standing there, he wondered if what he'd seen was still there, and all at once he knew it was, for he felt a friendliness come from it, as if it might be telling him that it still was there and not to be afraid.

He was just a little unnerved, for he was not used to friendliness. The only friend he had was Benny Smith, who was about his age, and he only saw Benny at school and then not all the time, for Benny was often ill and had to stay home for days on end, and since Benny lived way over on the other side of the school district he never saw him during vacation time at all.

By now his eyes were getting a little used to the darkness of the blackberry patch and he thought that he could see the darker outline of the thing that lay in there. He tried to understand

how it could *feel* friendly, for he was pretty sure that it was just a thing, like a wagon or a silo-filler, and nothing alive at all. If he'd thought that it was alive, he'd have been really scared.

The thing kept right on feeling friendly towards him.

He put out his hands and tried to push the bushes apart so that he could squeeze in and see what it was. If he could get close to it, he thought, he could strike the matches in his pocket and get a better look at it.

"Stop," said the friendliness, and at the word he stopped, although he wasn't sure at all that he had heard the word.

"Don't look too closely at us," said the friendliness, and Johnny was just a little flustered at that, for he hadn't been looking at anything at all—not too closely, that is.

"All right," he said. "I won't look at you." And he wondered if it was some sort of a game, like hide-and-seek that he played at school.

"After we get to be good friends," said the thing to Johnny, "we can look at one another and it won't matter then, for we'll know what we are like inside and not pay attention to how we look outside."

And Johnny, standing there, thought they must look awful, not to want him to see them, and the thing said to him, "We would look awful to you. You look awful to us."

"Then," said Johnny, "maybe it's a good thing I can't see in the dark."

"You can't see in the dark?" it asked, and Johnny said he couldn't and there was silence for a while, although Johnny could hear it puzzling over how it was that he couldn't see when it was dark.

Then it asked if he could do something else and he couldn't even understand what it tried to say and finally it seemed to realize that he couldn't do whatever it had asked about.

"You are afraid," said the thing. "There is no need to fear us."

Johnny explained that he wasn't afraid of them, whatever they might be, because they were friendly, but that he was afraid of what might happen if Uncle Eb and Aunt Em should find he had sneaked out. They asked him a lot about Uncle Eb and Aunt Em, and he tried to explain, but they didn't seem to understand and seemed to think he was talking about government. He tried to explain, but he was pretty sure they didn't understand at all.

Finally, being polite about it so he wouldn't hurt their feelings, he said he had to leave, and since he'd stayed much longer than he'd meant to, he ran all the way home.

He got into the house and up to bed all right and everything was fine, but the next morning Aunt Em found the matches in his pocket and gave him a lecture about the danger of burning down the barn. To reinforce the lecture she used a switch on his legs, and, try as hard as he could to be a man about it, she laid it on so hard that he jumped up and down and screamed.

He worked all day weeding the garden and just before dark went to get the cows.

He didn't have to go out of his way to go past the blackberry patch, for the cows were in that direction, but he knew that if they hadn't been, he would have gone out of his way, for he'd been remembering all day the friendliness he'd found there.

It was still daylight this time, just shading into night, and he could see that the thing, whatever it might be, was not alive, but simply a hunk of metal, like two dishes stuck together, with a rim running around its middle just as there'd be a rim if you stuck two dishes together. It looked like old metal that had been lying around for a long time and you could see where it was pitted the way a piece of machinery will get when it stands out in the weather.

It had crushed a path for quite a way through the blackberry thicket and had ploughed up the ground for twenty feet or so. Looking back along the way it had come, Johnny could see where it had hit and smashed the top of a tall poplar.

It spoke to him, without words, the way it had the night before, with friendliness and fellowship, although Johnny wouldn't know that last word, never having run across it in his schoolbooks. It said, " You may look at us a little now. Look at us quickly and then away. Don't look at us steadily. Just a quick look and then away. That way you get used to us. A little at a time."

" Where are you? " Johnny asked.

" Right here," they said.

" Inside there? " asked Johnny.

" Inside here," they said.

" I can't see you," said Johnny. " I can't see through metal."

" He can't see through metal," said one of them.

" He can't see when the star is gone," said the other.

" He can't see us, then," they said, both together.

" You might come out," said Johnny.

" We can't," they said. " We'd die if we came out."

" I can't ever see you, then? "

" You can't ever see us, Johnny." He stood there, feeling terribly lonely because he could never see these friends of his.

"We don't understand. Tell us who you are," they said.

And because they were so kind and friendly, he told them who he was and how he was an orphan and had been taken in by his Uncle Eb and Aunt Em, who weren't really his aunt and uncle. He didn't tell them how Uncle Eb and Aunt Em treated him, whipping him and scolding him and sending him to bed without his supper, but this, too, was there for them to sense, and now there was more than friendliness, more than fellowship. Now there was compassion and something that was their equivalent of mother love.

"He's just a little one," they said, talking to one another.

They reached out to him and seemed to take him in their arms and hold him tight against them, and Johnny went down on his knees without knowing it and held out his arms to the things that lay there among the broken bushes, and cried out to them, as if there was something there that he might grasp and hold—some comfort that he had always missed and longed for and now finally had found.

His heart cried out the thing that he could not say, the pleading that would not pass his lips, and they answered him. "No, we'll not leave you, Johnny. We can't leave you, Johnny."

"You promise?" Johnny asked.

Their voices were a little grim. "We do not need to promise, Johnny. Our machine is broken and we cannot fix it. One of us is dying and the other will soon die."

Johnny knelt there, with the words sinking into him, with the realization sinking into him, and it seemed more than he could bear that, when he had found friends, they were about to die.

"Johnny," they said to him.

"Yes," said Johnny, trying not to cry.

"You will trade with us?"

"Trade?"

"A way of friendship with us. You give us something and we give you something."

"But," said Johnny. "But I haven't . . ." Then he knew he had. He had the pocket-knife. It wasn't much, with its broken blade, but it was all he had.

"That is fine," they said. "That is exactly right. Lay it on the ground, close to the machine."

He took the knife out of his pocket and laid it against the machine and even as he watched something happened, but it happened so fast he couldn't see how it worked, but, anyhow, the knife was gone and there was something in its place.

"Thank you, Johnny," they said. "It was nice of you to trade with us."

He reached out his hand and took the thing they'd traded him, and even in the darkness it flashed with hidden fire. He turned it in the palm of his hand and saw that it was some sort of jewel, many-faceted, and the glow came from inside and it burnt with many different colours.

It wasn't until he saw how much light came from it that he realized how long he'd stayed and how dark it was, and when he saw that he jumped to his feet and ran, without waiting to say good-bye. It was too dark now to look for the cows and he hoped they had started home alone and that he could catch up with them and bring them in. He'd tell Uncle Eb that he'd had a hard time rounding them up. He'd tell Uncle Eb that the two heifers had broken out of the fence and he had to get them back. He'd tell Uncle Eb . . . he'd tell . . . he'd tell . . .

His breath gasped with his running, and his heart was thumping so that it seemed to shake him and fear rode on his shoulders—fear of the awful thing he'd done—of this final unforgivable thing after all the others, after not going to the spring to get the water, after missing the two heifers the night before, after the matches in his pocket.

He did not find the cows going home alone—he found them in the barnyard and he knew that they'd been milked and he knew he'd stayed much longer and that it was far worse than he had imagined. He walked up the rise to the house, shaking now with fear. There was a light in the kitchen and he knew that they were waiting.

He came into the kitchen and they sat at the table, facing him, waiting for him, with the lamplight on their faces, and their faces were so hard that they looked like graven stone.

Uncle Eb stood up, towering towards the ceiling, and you could see the muscles stand out on his arms, with his sleeves rolled to the elbow.

He reached for Johnny and Johnny ducked away, but the hand closed on the back of his neck and the fingers wrapped round his throat and lifted him and shook him with a silent savagery. "I'll teach you," Uncle Eb was saying through clenched teeth. "I'll teach you. I'll teach you . . ."

Something fell upon the floor and rolled towards the corner, leaving a trail of fire as it rolled along the floor.

Uncle Eb stopped shaking him and just stood there holding him for an instant, then dropped him to the floor.

"That fell out of your pocket," said Uncle Eb. "What is it?"

Johnny backed away, shaking his head.

He wouldn't tell what it was. He'd never tell. No matter

what Uncle Eb might do to him, he'd never tell. Not even if he killed him. Uncle Eb stalked the jewel, bent swiftly, and picked it up. He carried it back to the table and dropped it there and bent over, looking at it as it sparkled in the light.

Aunt Em leaned forward in her chair to look at it. "What in the world!" she said.

They bent there for a moment, staring at the jewel, their eyes bright and shining, their bodies tense, their breath rasping in the silence. The world could have come to an end right then and there and they'd never have noticed.

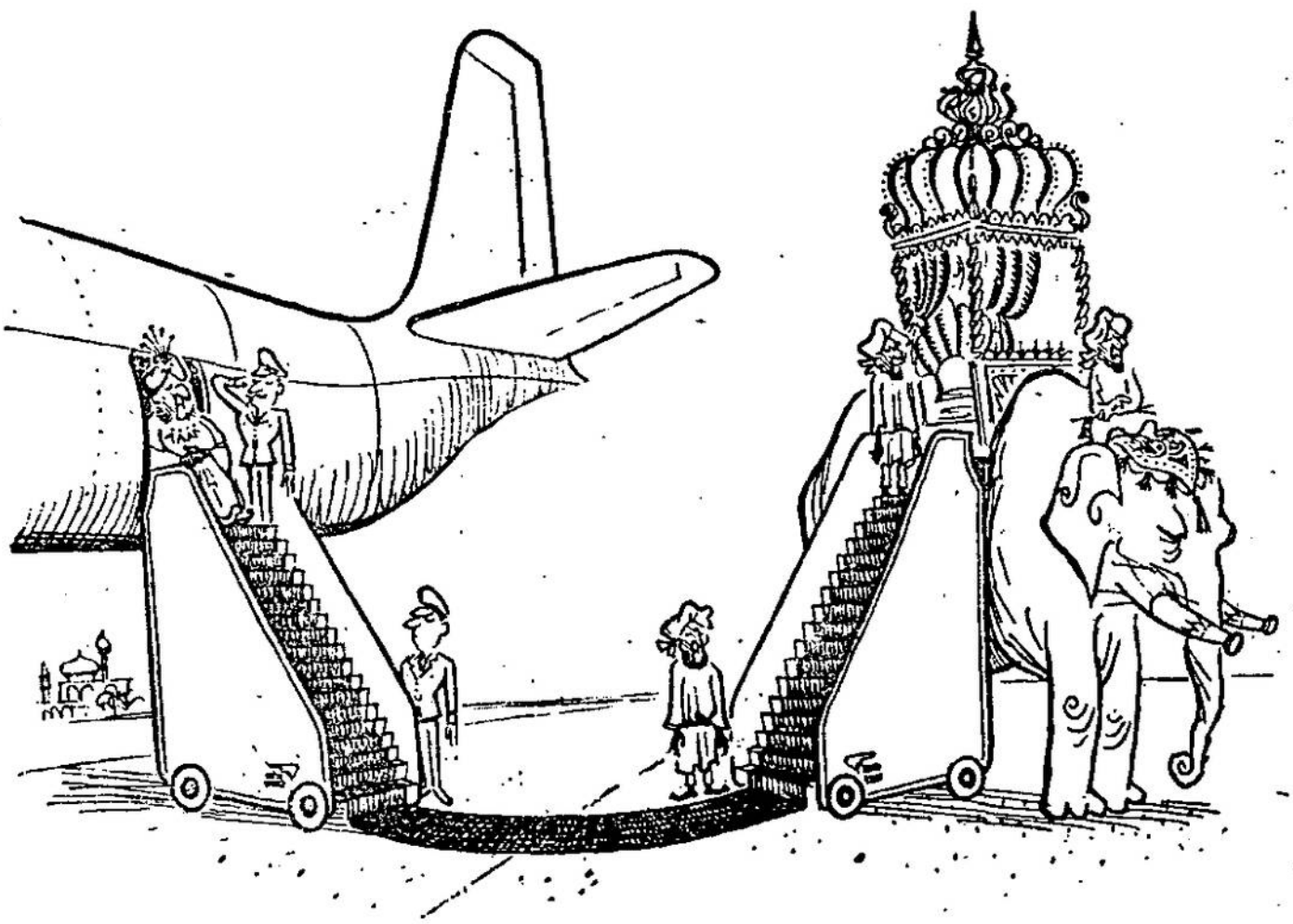
Then they straightened up and turned to look at Johnny, turning away from the jewel as if it didn't interest them any longer, as if it had had a job to do and had done that job and was no longer important. There was something wrong with them—no, not wrong, but different.

"You must be starved," Aunt Em said to Johnny. "I'll get you some supper. Would you like some eggs?"

Johnny gulped and nodded.

Uncle Eb sat down, not paying any attention to the jewel at all. "You know," he said, "I saw a jack-knife in town the other day. The kind you want . . ."

Johnny scarcely heard him. He just stood there, listening to the friendliness and love that hummed through all the house.



TOLEDO VIRGIN

He watched Maria's scarlet cloak
like a flame against the white houses

BY GEORGE JOHNSTON

THE Spanish agent in Cadiz of Andreas Kastalis, the Greek merchant of the island of Ydra, wore a plumed hat and a heavy scarlet cloak.

The plumed hat meant nothing to Captain John Drakoumis, master of the armed brig *Panaghia*, which, although the smallest of the Kastalis fleet of blockade-runners that sailed out of Ydra, was a fast, handy ship and a fine command for a man not yet thirty-two. But in five trips running the blockade to Spain he had always found himself coveting a long red cloak like the one that Señor Manuel, the agent, wore.

Such a garment had never formed a part of the price of trade or barter for the Crimean wheat which, in the interests of his owner and at considerable personal risk, he had ferried to the hungry Spaniards through the British naval blockade. As he was a man of little vanity, it had never occurred to him that he might have bought one on his own account . . .

On this night early in October of 1805, sitting in a waterfront tavern, low-lamplit and smelling of sherry and with the sound of the off-straits tide lapping the musselled piles outside, it was clear to Captain John that another gauntlet had been run, all the way from the Black Sea—but there was still no red cloak at the end of it.

Being Spanish, the agent was well enough aware of how deeply the Greek sailor coveted such a garment—indeed, he would make a point of flaunting it with an arrogant swirl whenever he entered the room—but it was certainly not a spare scarlet cloak which he had brought along to this rendezvous in the low-beamed taproom of the Albacore Inn.

What he had brought, in fact, was a Spanish priest from Toledo—on his face an expression of tired compassion, and around his thin body a faded but neatly patched cassock; the priest had brought with him five servant-girls and two seamstresses who had undertaken to venture their destinies in distant Greece.

The seven sat now in a nervously silent row on a long bench at the dark end of the room. Five were fat and uncomely; one was thin and looked ill-humoured; but the seventh, a young girl by the name of Maria Juanita, was uncommonly beautiful.

She was the only other person in the room who wore a red cloak, although hers was cut woman-style with a deep overmantle, and, bright as it was in colour, it was of a coarse, cheap stuff quite unlike the material in Señor Manuel's rich garment . . .

For the moment, however, Captain John's attention was on the agent, the thin priest, and the golden icon of the Virgin which lay on the table between them, glittering in the lamplight.

It was not a large icon but it was ornate and deeply encased, and the intricately hammered gold covered all but the four apertures that revealed the painted face and hands of the Madonna and the tiny figure of the Christ-child.

" Toledo is far away," said the priest, thinking of his journey down through the stricken countryside in search of succour for his people.

" Sevastopol is farther," Captain John said to himself, thinking of his journey down to Spain all the way from the Black Sea; thinking of the storm off Monemvasia, and the running fight with the British sloop south of the Balearics. He did not say it aloud because of the bruised eyes of the priest.

" Our people are hungry," the priest went on patiently. " Many have starved. How much of the food that comes to the ports here ever reaches the cities inland? By our offering this—" he lowered sad eyes to the icon—" perhaps you can understand the desperation of our plight. That the Church should be willing to part with the Toledo Virgin that the suffering of its children might be spared . . ." Again his voice trailed off.

Captain John looked away from the pain that was in the priest's eyes, glimpsed the subdued ruddiness of the girl's cloak beneath the shadowy corner beams, and remarked to himself that she looked weary and ill-nourished. But he shrugged as he said, " It is for Señor Manuel to say. If he is satisfied . . ." He smiled at the priest. " My job is to bring the grain from Russia. It is for Señor Manuel to say what should be paid for it."

His smile broadened, which made him look even younger. " If the Admiral isn't satisfied it's not *I* who get the kicks."

Among the Ydra captains old Andreas Kastalis was always referred to as the Admiral although he was only a rich merchant who owned ships and had never been to sea.

Señor Manuel plucked thoughtfully at a loose thread of embroidery on his scarlet cloak.

For a long time now, the Ydra brigs had been the only vessels

willing to run the gauntlet of the blockade, and the Ydra merchants had made so much money out of the dangerous traffic that they no longer knew what to do with it, and were willing to take almost anything in payment for the grain and food they smuggled to the starving countries—bands of skilled artisans to help construct the great mansions they were building, furniture, chandeliers, rugs, pictures, holy treasures, even servant-girls . . .

Señor Manuel tapped the embroidery thread with the one fingernail that was an inch longer than its fellows, smiled in a benevolent way, and said blandly, " I feel sure the Admiral would like to know that one of his ships has been the instrument by which the suffering of the people of Toledo has been alleviated. Moreover, the payment for thirteen hundred sacks of grain is not unreasonable. Adding it up, we have forty-two gold crowns in cash, five chests of tools for the carpenters you took to Ydra on your last passage, some excellent French furniture of the period the Admiral particularly admires, and an icon of gold."

" Solid gold," said the priest.

" Of solid gold," Señor Manuel repeated pleasantly, and smiled at the Greek Captain. " The appeal to the Admiral's tastes will be temporal as well as spiritual. Moreover, I am led to believe that this icon has certain—er—properties."

He cocked an inquiring eye at the priest, who nodded and said quietly, " Such beliefs are a question of faith."

" Quite." The agent nodded agreeably. " One hopes for the sake of Captain Drakoumis that these magical properties are protective rather than—er—curative." He stroked his beard gently and frowned. " There's trouble afoot."

Captain John glanced at him quickly, and the priest murmured, " There is always trouble."

" Ah, but did you know that our ships have been readying themselves for something for the last three days and nights? " Señor Manuel lowered his voice meaningly. " There's not a ship's chandler in Cadiz who has had his doors closed for more than an hour since Tuesday. And when the *San Cristobal* came in yesterday her master reported the British ships as thick as gulls all the way from here to Tarifa. That devil Nelson is thirsty for blood and timber."

Captain John shrugged, paused a moment, and said, " In your tally of the payment you forgot the girls."

" Ah yes, the girls," said the agent dismissively. He smiled. " I understand the house of the Admiral begins now to resemble a palace. Still, I think he will find our Spanish girls good workers." He turned, raised his eye-glass, and favoured the seven girls on the bench with a distant scrutiny.

" They look exhausted, and they haven't eaten," said Captain John. " So if that settles the matter, I'll have Dimitri the mate come in and get them fed and take them aboard where they can rest. We must clear the harbour by eight bells."

The priest carefully wrapped the Toledo icon in faded cloth, handed it reluctantly to the Greek, crossed himself, and walked away with bowed head to where the girls were sitting.

The *Panaghia* went out on the midnight ebb with a fresh offshore wind which petered away to nothing after four hours. Dawn came like an oyster opening, with the pale translucent greyness broken on the port side by the misty snout of Cap de Trafalgar and on the starboard by the sinister, ghosting shape of His Majesty's 32-gun frigate, *Surprise*, and behind her a crescent of men-of-war strung out all the way to the southern horizon.

An hour later Captain John Drakoumis was ferried across to the British flagship in the *Surprise*'s gig, and forced to climb the side ladder with two British muskets jabbed very firmly into the small of his back. He was escorted straight to the quarter-deck and there planted squarely on the scrubbed planks in front of a small, shy-looking man wearing an admiral's faded blue coat.

The man wore a patch over one eye and the empty sleeve of the shabby coat was pinned up. He had a soft, inquiring voice.

" What would you do," he said, after he had asked some other questions, " if you captured a man who, in a time of war, was running supplies through to your enemies? "

Captain John considered the question for quite half a minute, frowning as he sought for the English words, and then he said, " Why, I'd hang the fellow from the yard-arm," because, being a truthful man, he felt this to be the right answer to the question. Being a seaman, he did not in fact use the word " fellow " but another word which cannot be printed but which the man in the admiral's faded coat clearly understood.

So what happened then was that the Admiral sent him back to the *Panaghia* in the gig that had brought him, with a present of a whole keg of good British Admiralty rum; and Captain John was still thinking of this that night when they were running easy into the Mediterranean with the lights of Ceuta astern of them.

And Dimitri the mate was thinking of it too, but in a different way, because just after the change of watches he said, " That Spanish girl, the good-looking one—while you were over there on that warship she made me go with her down into the cabin, and she asked me to get out that icon the priest gave you, and all the time you were away she stayed down there with the icon."

" Why should she do that? " asked Captain John.

Maybe it was because of this that the Captain found himself looking at the girl called Maria Juanita among the fat and plain ones when they were brought on deck next morning. He thought she looked like a trim sloop among a mess of market-boats.

" That's the girl I was talking about last night," said the mate, and the Captain nodded, his eyes still on the girl. There must have been a certain intensity in his gaze because Maria Juanita caught his eye and flushed and looked away.

Captain John took from the pocket of his jacket the big string of amber beads he always played with when he was thoughtful, and he was still running them through his fingers to the accompaniment of a sequence of faint little clicking noises, rather like an insect in woodwork, when he found himself standing by the midships house talking to the Spanish girl—talking slowly and selectively because he was never quite sure of his Spanish.

" It's a long way, Greece, for a young girl to be going," he was saying, " and not knowing what it might be like there."

" Yes," said the girl, and although she lowered her eyes demurely he had the impression that she was not daunted by the prospect before her. This impression, in fact, was subordinate to several other impressions he had—an impression of eyes that were very dark and beautiful, and of a soft red mouth, redder even than the cloak she wore, and of a line of sunlight that ran from beneath her cheekbone to the tip of her chin. It was because of the sunlight on the tip of her chin that he had the impulse to say, " Andreas Kastalis is a good man, and his wife is kindly. You will find they will be good to you."

Maria Juanita nodded, and looked across to where four dolphins were moving in jets of blue and white towards the African coast.

He wondered whether he should say something about the dolphins, because coming from an inland city like Toledo it was unlikely that she would ever have seen such creatures before, and there was much that could be said about dolphins, but he found himself thinking of the effect her dark eyes would have on the young men of Ydra, and so he said, " Probably you will marry somebody there, and then Andreas Kastalis will provide you with your dowry—proika is the name we call it—and he'll set you up in a little house and even become godfather to your children."

" Is that a rosary you have in your hand? " asked Maria Juanita, keeping her eyes fixed on the string of big amber beads.

" This? " Captain John twirled the tasselled string and flicked three or four of the beads along with his thumb. " A rosary, no. This is a kombolloi. It's . . . it's just something to fiddle with . . . something to do with your hands when you're thinking of things.

It's a Turkish habit. I got these two years ago in Constantinople."

He held the beads out so she could look at them, and they lay, round and yellow and glossy, in the palm of his brown hand, like the eggs of some strange bird. "This is a very good kombolloi," he said proudly. "Those beads, they're pure amber."

Maria Juanita nodded and smiled slightly. Captain John stared out across the weather rail but the dolphins had gone and there was no point in talking about them.

They had left Cape Bon behind them on the starboard quarter when the wind began to come hard and gusty off the bare coast of Tunisia in spiteful jabs that cut white arrowmarks all over the dark lumps of sea. The wind flung stinging grit into the faces of the seamen, and the sky changed to an ominous slaty flatness that seemed to be lit from behind by smouldering fires.

By the time they were in sight of Pantelleria—when they could see the high rock, that is, through the welter of spume to leeward—the sirocco was battering the little brig with enough violence to bring a frown of anxiety to the brow of Captain John.

By the time dusk came Pantelleria was a black leeshore of the utmost menace, encircled by a jagged collar of white like the fangs of ravenous beasts.

Under bare poles except for a storm-staysail and close-reefed topsails, almost on her beam-ends and with her decks washed fore and aft, the *Panaghia* struggled with a sturdy valiance that testified both to Captain John's seamanship and to the craft of the Ydra shipbuilders; but with each buffeting of the great seas that swept snarling across her, she dragged closer to the inshore rocks.

The storm reached a pitch of such intensity that the howling of the wind became a single continuous sound, a sustained high-pitched whine. The tops of the waves were taken off and spread through the gloom in thick rushes of white. Captain John ordered the boatswain to make sure that the ship's longboat was not dried into the paint in its chocks, and then he sent Dimitri below to bring up the log book and the women.

It was just as both topsails blew out together with a report like a man-of-war's broadside and went away to leeward in grey flogging ribbons of canvas, and the *Panaghia* rolled down shuddering into a dark scoop of lee-water, that Captain John realized Maria Juanita was crouched beside him trying to tell him something. She had one hand clutched tightly on the sleeve of his jacket and the other was clinging to the taffrail, and her face and hair were soaked with spray.

The wind was pressing the red cloak around her slender body in a way that was both disturbing and beautiful at the same time.

The screeching of the wind carried off her words, so Captain

John took her by the waist and dragged her down beside him in the lee of the cabin skylight—and here was another curious contradiction, for her body, pressed against his, was warm and cold at the same time—and after a few moments he realized that what she was trying to tell him was something about the Toledo Virgin and the qualities the icon possessed . . .

That was how it came about that Captain John made his vow that if his ship were spared he would present the golden icon of the Toledo Virgin to the Church of the Panaghia on the island of Tinos. This particular church on Tinos was felt to have a powerful influence on the fortunes of Greek mariners.

Whether his vow had anything to do with it or not, within fifteen minutes the wind had swung round to the eastward and diminished in violence, and although for an hour or two there was an ugly cross-sea which threatened to shake the masts out of the brig while the crew bent new topsails, the *Panaghia* was able to weather Pantelleria without trouble, and when dawn came they were under full sail and running through a sea that was all sunlight.

In the forenoon, there was a whole flotilla of dolphins escorting them on the weather beam and Captain John spent some time explaining to Maria Juanita the habits of these creatures.

The weather stayed fair and the sea calm, and four days later they were sailing into the little half-moon harbour of Ydra, where small white houses and big stone houses climbed up the rocky cliffs, and from the terrace of his great mansion above the port, old Andreas Kastalis was hoisting flags and firing three cannons for the safe homecoming of his ship.

Captain John bowed to each of the Spanish women when they went ashore, and wished them well. They were round-eyed and a little timid under the strange appearance of their new home. He stood in the rigging watching them as they went up the narrow, winding steps behind the mules carrying their little wooden boxes. Against the white houses and grey shutters the red cloak of Maria Juanita glowed like a tiny pinpoint of fire.

After he had arranged for Manolis to bring his mules to carry the French furniture and the five chests of carpenters' tools, Captain John left the Toledo Virgin in the care of Dimitri the mate, with very specific instructions, then went ashore to take a few glasses of wine with two other captains in a waterfront tavern. This done, he slowly climbed the steps to make his report to Andreas Kastalis.

He found the shipowner in excellent humour. The arrival of the seven Toledo girls had given great pleasure to his wife, and the French furniture was exactly what he needed to set off a new

salon which he had had the Spanish carpenters build for him.

Captain John presented the brig's log book, the inventory, a copy of the victualling accounts, the leather bag containing the forty-two gold crowns, a satchel of letters and a bottle of the best sherry from Señor Manuel. He then gave a straightforward and undramatic account of the voyage.

Being an honest man, he also told the full story of the Toledo Virgin, not omitting his promise that it should go to the island of Tinos. But while he was telling this part of the story he found his mind curiously entangled with a picture of Maria Juanita standing on the reeling quarter-deck with the spray in her hair and the red cloak pressed around her, and so he gave this part of the account slowly and thoughtfully—and because he was thoughtful he took the kombolloi from his pocket and began to slide the amber beads through his fingers.

"You have done well, Captain John," said Kastalis expansively, walking across to the great mahogany sideboard. "Very well indeed! And now you must drink with me."

The captain inclined his head. He had a liking for the shipowner's wine and hoped that Señor Manuel's bottle of sherry might be opened. But Kastalis said, "I have some casks of a new mavrodaphni from Patras, and I had four bottles drawn only last night. I must have known you were nearing a landfall, eh? You have never tasted such wine. Black as sin, and almost as pleasurable." The old man made the comment with a chuckle because he considered himself to have a reputation for wickedness. "You enjoy a good mavrodaphni?"

"I do," he said, although his true taste was for the sherry.

"That is a very splendid kombolloi you have," the old man continued admiringly, as he handed the Captain a big Venetian goblet filled to the brim with a liquid coloured like the reflections of fires burning in the night.

The Captain gave a complacent flip to the amber beads. "I had it from Constantinople two years back."

"Really? I never remember seeing it. I have always coveted a kombolloi just like that one. On your next passage, Captain, you must try to get one for me—one exactly the same."

Captain John bunched the beads into the cup of his hand, tossed them once into the air, caught them, and handed them across to the old man.

"Take this," he said, for although he had a great attachment to the kombolloi he also had a faint twinge of guilt that he had deprived his owner of an icon of solid gold to which he was, strictly speaking, entitled. The least he could do in recompense was to offer him the admired kombolloi as a gift.

"I would not dream of taking it," Kastalis protested.

"It is yours."

"I would never accept it," said Kastalis half-heartedly.

"I can get another."

"Then we must have more wine," said the old man happily, his neat fingers caressing the amber beads. "*Much* more wine."

An hour later, Captain John, seaboots and all, was stretched out, dead to the world, on a fine Venetian couch which he had brought back from the Adriatic two voyages before.

Two hours later Andreas Kastalis returned contentedly to his home, removed his woollen topcoat, tiptoed into the drawing-room, returned the string of amber beads to the jacket pocket of the sleeping Captain, took a glass of Señor Manuel's sherry, and retired to his bed to dream of a new terrace with marble statues.

It was getting close to dawn and the sky was pale above the rocky hills when Captain John emerged through a torment of queer flickering images into an active awareness of the acute form of malaise that invariably afflicts those who drink too deeply of mavrodaphni.

He was not immediately sure of his surroundings since his eyes focused first, slowly and painfully, on an ornate ceiling carved indubitably by Spanish artisans, and when he lowered his eyes he saw that his body was wrapped in a bright scarlet cloak. He was in Cadiz then . . . Even through his pain ran a faint sensation of pleasure that he had finally acquired a cloak like the one Señor Manuel wore. But when he looked again he saw that the cloak was of cheaper stuff and of brighter colour, and totally lacking in embroidery. For some curious reason this realization accentuated rather than diminished the pleasure.

And then he felt a cool, small hand on his forehead, and heard a soft voice which said, "You must close your eyes, and I will bring you water." He obeyed instantly, because with his eyes closed he could see very vividly the picture of the girl in the red cloak against the storm off Pantelleria.

"There's something that puzzles me," he said, watching the picture of the girl against the coloured darkness behind his closed eyelids. "That day they took me aboard the British warship, why did you make Dimitri give you the icon?"

"I wanted to pray to it," the voice said simply. "I did not want anything to happen to you. The British are very ferocious when they are at war."

"Why should you have worried about me?"

"In Cadiz you were the only one who thought of us—the only one who understood that we were tired and hungry."

He opened his eyes and the sight of the red cloak pleased him more than ever, even though the seaboots sticking out from beneath it seemed incongruous.

" And when you found me here in the night you put your cloak across me," he said. He turned his head and looked at her, and in the dusky half light he could see the dark shine of her hair. " It's strange," he said thoughtfully, " but this is the sort of cloak I've always wanted. A red one, like this."

Maria Juanita began to move away to fetch the water, and just as she reached the door he said, " Maybe when I go to Tinos to take the icon there, you should come along with me. Maybe I need somebody to look after me."

The door closed softly behind her.

At first, when Dimitri the mate told him what had happened, Captain John was very angry. His face was dark as he said, " I told you the icon was *not* to be given out of your charge."

Dimitri flushed and said defensively, " How was I to know? When the messenger came from Kastalis he carried your kombolloi. He showed it to me as a proof that the message came from you, and said you'd sent for the icon."

Captain John's hand moved instinctively to the pocket of his jacket, and he could feel the round gloss of the amber beads. " The kombolloi's here, in my pocket," he said angrily.

" Last night it wasn't," said Dimitri. " The messenger had it. Maybe you'd been drinking too much."

" Perhaps I had," Captain John admitted, remembering he had made a present of the beads to Kastalis. It was difficult to account for the fact that they were now back in his pocket. " What happened to the icon, did you hear? " he asked quietly.

" They told me later, yes," said Dimitri, mollified by the change in his Captain's manner. " Kastalis came down with the priest from that big church the old man built along the other end of the port, and they took the icon along to *that* church and installed it there. The old man's very proud of that church of his." Dimitri frowned and scratched his head. " It would be sacrilege now to take it away from there."

" It would, yes," agreed Captain John, who was a pious man, even if he had used a rude word to a British admiral. He took out his kombolloi, stared at it thoughtfully, and began to run the beads through his fingers.

" Perhaps," he said, " this explains why some men live all their lives in cottages and others build great houses."

" Some men are shrewder than others," said Dimitri.

Captain John gave a sudden flip to the string of beads and

smiled. " That Spanish girl, the pretty one," he said. " She told me something about that icon. It isn't the real one at all, it's a copy. It's not solid gold, either—just silver, plated over. The real one's still there, in Toledo."

" Maybe they have big houses on the hills in Toledo too," said Dimitri, and grinned.

The noonday cannons were thundering their volleys from the little fortress on the headland above the port when Captain John climbed the steps to the Kastalis mansion. He found the old man in conference with the foreman of his Spanish workmen, on plans for a new terrace with marble statues in the niches.

" I brought back that kombolloi," said Captain John. " When I woke up I found it in my pocket."

" I put it there." The old man smiled gently. " While you were sleeping. I felt I could not accept as a gift something which to you was obviously an object of personal— "

" I'm not bringing it back as a gift. I want to sell it."

" To sell it? " Kastalis cocked his thick white eyebrows.

" Well, to trade it, anyway. There's a red cloak I want for it. I've always wanted a red cloak, a Spanish cloak."

" My dear Captain, I don't understand," said the old man.

So Captain John grinned rather selfconsciously, and placed the string of amber beads on the table between the old shipowner and his Spanish foreman, and made his explanation. And old Kastalis chuckled at the end of it and said, " So you'll have your virgin of Toledo, anyway, eh? "

" I'll have her, yes," said Captain John staunchly.

When he had gone, Andreas Kastalis found himself staring down at the kombolloi lying on the table. Finally he picked it up and smiled to himself as he caressed the amber beads through his old thin fingers. He was lost in his thoughts, and the only sound in the warm stillness around him was the faint clicking of the beads, like an insect in woodwork.

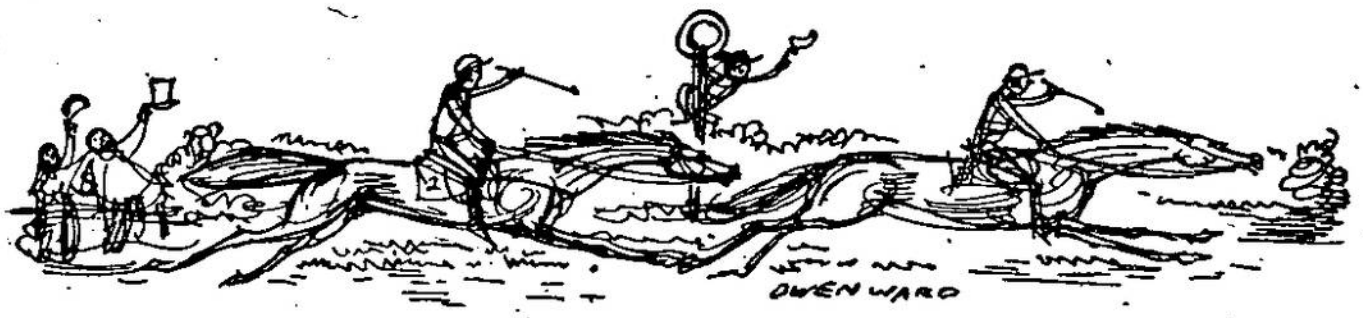
He looked up. From the kitchen he could hear one of the Spanish girls singing in a high, clear voice. He lifted his eyes to the swarthy face of the Spanish foreman, and smiled.

" The new terrace can wait until the spring," he said. " The Captain will marry soon—a compatriot of yours. We must have a fine house built for them—a fine new house on one of the hills where they can look across the sea . . . "

* * *

ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?



racing & chasing

There was racing and chasing on Cannobie Lea
SIR WALTER SCOTT

As we came from the races,
At our tandem's best paces,
We rivalled the graces, we outshone the Queen;
With our satins and laces
And the smiles on our faces,
We wiped out the traces where sorrow had been.
JOHN MASEFIELD, *The Midnight Folk*

Blind Hazard

The point-to-point course lay on the exposed and windswept side of a hill and the cold which assailed Amabelle's party on their arrival at this scene of action was beyond what would be thought possible by anyone not accustomed to the pleasures of rural England in winter . . .

"Here they come," said Paul excitedly. "Walter's still leading; aren't you thrilled, darling? Over the water jump, only one more now—over that—here they come—come on, Walter—come on, old boy—"

The horses thundered towards them, Walter leading easily. They approached the last fence, rose to it, Walter for some reason lost his balance and fell heavily to earth. Six horses in rapid succession jumped into the small of his back and passed on.

"You see," said Walter that evening, as they settled down to bridge, "the great advantage of getting blind before point-to-points. Sober I should certainly have been killed, as it is my left knee is a little sore but otherwise I feel grand."

"The only thing is," said Amabelle, "that if you'd been a shade less drunk you might easily have won the race, instead of losing my five shillings in that careless way."

NANCY MITFORD,
Christmas Pudding

Bob Each Way

Camptown ladies sing dis song, doodah, doodah,
Camptown race-track five miles long, doodah, doodah, day.
Gwine to run all night, gwine to run all day!
I'll bet my money on de bob-tailed nag,
Somebody bet on de bay.

See dem flying on a ten-mile beat, doodah, doodah,
Roun' de race-track, den repeat, doodah, doodah, day.

I come down dah wid my hat caved in, doodah, doodah,
Go back home wid a pocket full of tin, doodah, doodah, day.

I win my money on de bob-tailed nag, doodah, doodah,
Keep my money in a ole tow-bag, doodah, doodah, day.
Gwine to run all night, gwine to run all day,
I'll bet my money on de bob-tailed nag,
Somebody bet on de bay.

STEPHEN COLLINS FOSTER, *Camptown Races*

Run in

"Watch your horse," he said in a quick warning voice, "watch Miss Lucy come home."

They stood up, scrambled to their feet on the bench, every vein in them suddenly beating so violently they could hardly focus their eyes, and saw a thin little mahogany-coloured streak flash by the judges' stand, only a neck ahead, but their Miss Lucy, oh, their darling, their lovely—oh, Miss Lucy, their Uncle Gabriel's Miss Lucy, had won, had won. They leaped up and down screaming and clapping their hands, their hats falling back on their shoulders, their hair flying wild. *Whoa, you heifer,* squalled the band with snorting brasses, and the crowd broke into a long roar like the falling of the walls of Jericho . . .

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER, *Old Mortality*

In the Same Tote

Brothers, the country's crying need
Is horses that run at an equal speed
And a stone-dead heat on every track
And everyone getting their money back.

OGDEN NASH, *Hark! Hark!*
The Pari-Mutuels Bark!

Water Jump

He now had the lead as he had desired. . . . and felt certain of success. His excitement, his joy and tenderness for Frou-Frou increased. He wanted to look back, but dared not, and tried to calm himself and not to spur his mare too much, so as to reserve her energy. The most difficult jump was still before him; if he could clear that first he was sure to win the race. They drew near to the Irish bank. Both he and Frou-Frou could see it from a distance, and each felt a moment of hesitation.

Vronsky noticed the hesitation in his horse's ears, but instantly felt that she regained her confidence and knew exactly what to do. She made a tremendous effort, rose in the air, and with one bound cleared the bank and the ditch together and went on without changing the measure of her pace.

" Bravo, Vronsky! " the crowd shouted. . .

LEO TOLSTOY, *Anna Karenina*

Last Lap

You may overlap at the saddle-flap, and yet be loo'd on the tape:
And it all depends upon changing ends, how a seven-year-old will shape;
It was tack and tack to the Lepe and back—a fair dingdong to the Ridge
And he led by his forward canvas yet as we shot 'neath Hammersmith Bridge.

He led by his forward canvas—he led from his strongest suit—
But along we went on a roaring scent, and at Fawley I gained a foot.
He fisted off with his jigger, and gave me his wash—too late!
Deuce—Vantage—Check! By neck and neck we rounded into the straight.

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH, *The Famous Ballad of the Jubilee Cup*

PARLEYVOO

His English was wonderful, considering

BY WOLF MANKOWITZ

"JEAN-LOUIS is an efficiency expert, really, aren't you, Jean-Louis—an efficiency expert?" The dark girl with short legs like peanuts wriggled in her armchair.

Mrs. Pargeter, the grocer's wife, looked at Jean-Louis and thought how expensive all those fancy French cheeses were. But they bought them, so what could you say? A good bit of Cheddar took some beating though, say what you like, you can't beat the old Cheddar when it's good. Half the time you couldn't make out what they were saying. It must be terrible to be a foreigner.

"Yes?" said Mr. Pargeter, wiping his moustache gently with a dark blue handkerchief. "Must be interesting work. Take the grocery for instance. In the grocery you have to be efficient, I don't care what you say, take any perishable goods for instance; if you order too many of them and you have miscalculated your public, why then, what's the net result? Loss, sheer gross loss."

"Please," said Jean-Louis, "a little more quick. I am in England four months. If you go a little more quick I am listen and do understand how you are speak."

"A little *slower*, Jean-Louis," the dark girl said. "His English is wonderful, considering. I think he has done wonders, considering." She showed her teeth to Jean-Louis and wriggled again.

He smiled winningly at Mrs. Pargeter. The grocer's wife smiled back, thinking, I'm not sorry that Dorothy left the shop when she did. Women with big teeth are always a bit that way, although I don't say she wasn't a good cashier.

Mr. Pargeter was watching the dark girl cross her legs. Short but sturdy, he thought, these girls with strong legs take some beating, say what you like. He laughed.

"Let us all share in your little joke, Fred," said Mrs. Pargeter with *that* smile. If she caught him pinching the Ramage girl's bottom again underneath the counter, *she* would have to go, too. "It's not fair to keep a good joke to oneself, is it, Mr. Payray?" Mind you, foreigners had nice smiles, and a brown

shirt with a brown tie to match gave them an air of you-know.

"Call him Jean-Louis, Mrs. Pargeter," said the dark girl. "In Paree one does not stand on ceremony, n'est-ce pas, Jean-Louis?"

"Pé-ré, P, EY, R, EY, Pé-ré," explained Jean-Louis.

"Pay-ray, Pay-ray," answered Mrs. Pargeter. "I've got it."

"Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay," said Mr. Pargeter.

"Just call him Jean-Louis, he won't mind." The dark girl uncrossed her legs.

The marines was there, thought Mr. Pargeter. "How about another drink? Drink, Mr. uh—Pay—?"

"Pay-ray, Fred. Fred has no grasp, I'm afraid, though he's a wonder on figures." Mrs. Pargeter's temper was fraying.

Ay-ay, thought Mr. Pargeter as Jean-Louis crossed to the dark girl's chair and edged his arm round her waist. You can't beat it, Mr. Pargeter thought. "Now what are we all drinking?"

"Plain vermouth for Jean-Louis, isn't it, darling, just the vermouth plain?"

"I think you've had enough, Fred," Mrs. Pargeter said with that smile again. But Mr. Pargeter was asking the dark girl how she liked it, long or with less water than gin, take your choice. Pretending he didn't notice his wife's warning, he poured himself another large whisky.

"Well, here's all the best to all of us, and may we all get whatever we want in life." He drank half the whisky in the glass. "Good luck to us all," he said, "best of luck, Mr. Whatnot, good luck, Dorothy, don't do anything I wouldn't do, all the best, dear. Drink up."

They drank up, Mrs. Pargeter giving Mr. Pargeter the signal to slow down, Jean-Louis looked deep into the dark girl's eyes, which tried to look back over the rim of the glass. His hand was on the dark girl's thigh. Mr. Pargeter caught the signal, and refilled his glass quickly.

"One last one for the road, my dear," he said, "last one, longest one. That's the ticket, John-Louey," he added as Jean-Louis pushed the dark girl's glass away and kissed her full on the mouth.

"Well," Mrs. Pargeter said, "well, there is a limit." This is the last time that hussy comes into my house with her fancy men, and Fred looking at them as if they were a couple of rabbits, well, after all, well.

"Fred," she said sternly, "what's the time, Fred? It must be after eleven." She managed to get that smile into her voice, and it brought the dark girl to her senses.

"Look at us," she giggled. "Really, Jean-Louis, this isn't

Gay Paree, you have to watch your p's and q's. I say, what a fright I must be looking. Oh dear, Mr. and Mrs. P., whatever will you be thinking of us? I don't know what I shall look like in the morning." Jean-Louis was bumbling into her ear: *When I took you in my arm, Je vois la vie en rose.*

She pushed his hand away and stretched for her bag. Mr. Pargeter smiled as he reached absent-mindedly for the bottle. But Mrs. Pargeter reached it first and tucked it firmly under her chair. The dark girl used a thin lipstick quickly, giving herself a neat outline which ignored her lips completely.

" I don't know how I shall look in the morning. I'm terrible getting up in the morning."

Mr. Pargeter leered over her compact mirror.

" It's nicer to lie in bed, Dorothy love," he said.

They watched Jean-Louis accompany his song with a few neat dance steps.

" He's always like that," the dark girl said proudly. " Soon as he wakes up, bounces out of bed, full of beans."

" Well! " Mrs. Pargeter said. " Well! "

" So he says anyway, don't you, Jean-Louis? " the dark girl added, blushing. " Up with the lark, he says," she continued, looking away from Mrs. Pargeter but with a sly grin.

" Early to bed, early to rise," said Mr. Pargeter watching the dark girl's legs as she stood up.

" Good night then," she added, " thanks for a lovely time. Come on, Jean-Louis, maintenant bonne nuit."

" What about one for the road? " asked Mr. Pargeter.

" Now you didn't have a hat, did you, dear," Mrs. Pargeter stated firmly as she coldly handed them their coats.

While she saw them to the door Mr. Pargeter had the presence of mind to get the bottle from underneath the chair and pour himself a stiff one. When the front door had clicked to she came back into the room. She didn't have that smile on her face.

" I didn't invent sex you know, Emily," he said, half truculent, half querulous.

But Mrs. Pargeter knew better.

★ ★ ★

SHARP PRACTICE

A myopic, much occupied diseuse
Mislaid a small pair of sharp twiseuse
But they, being prickly,
Were found very quickly,
Her chauffeur inquiring, " Are thiseuse? "

CHARLOTTE LEIGH

VOYAGE INTO ILLUSION

Surely it was a trick of the moon?

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

THE steward was young, and the band of freckles across the top of his nose made him look even younger. He was carrying, not very expertly, a tray with glasses on it.

A tall glass of iced lager went to the savage-looking woman who wore her bangles with the air of an experienced gladiator coming out for another dusty battle in the arena of life. A brandy-and-soda for the savage lady's red-faced, white-moustached husband. Major and Mrs. Corret, said the steward to himself. A large part of his job was getting the right names attached to the right faces.

A medium-sized gin with French vermouth for the girl in the cut-away linen dress with the gold hair and the biscuit-coloured suntan. French. Marianne something-or-other— You could always get by with a French girl by calling her M'selle.

A large gin to Mr. Clinton, the owner of the yacht *Medea*. Mr. Clinton was his employer and had a smooth, round face, a smooth, round smile, and a sharp pair of eyes. A very large gin for Captain Harbert, the certificated skipper of the yacht. The second part of the steward's trade was observation, and he saw that the Captain was already a little drunk. The large gin with a splash of water would take him a long step further.

As he turned to go, the girl said lazily, " Oh, steward."

" M'selle? "

" I take it you mixed this martini yourself? "

" Yes, m'selle."

" By the light of your own unaided intelligence? "

" Certainly, m'selle."

" Next time I suggest you use the book. It requires half as much gin, twice as much vermouth, and a dash of bitters."

The steward flushed, bowed slightly, and withdrew. As he closed the door he heard Clinton say reproachfully, " Stewards aren't all that easy to get, Marianne."

A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

The steward, moving away down the passage, shook his head like a diver surfacing after a deep dive. But there was no time for resentment. There was too much to do.

The *Medea*, though all of two hundred tons' capacity, could hardly be expected to carry such a luxury as a second steward. Until the four passengers were all safely tucked up in their own, or each other's bunks, he was going to be on the run. If the weather had been bad, his job might have been easier, but the Solent had never looked calmer. The afterglow of a long summer's day lay on the smooth sea like a mantle. How lovely it would be, he thought, to strip off the tight white uniform and dive into the water and swim to some beach where the sand was still warm from the sun.

Major Corret's cabin. There were two suitcases thrown on the bunk, one opened, the other closed but unlocked. And a battered leather holdall containing brushes and a razor. A seasoned traveller, the Major. The steward's fingers moved deftly, removing clothes and packing them neatly away in the built-in cupboard under the bunk. He seemed, somehow, to be cleverer at this part of his trade than he was at handing round drinks. One of the ties that he unpacked bore the broad stripes of the Brigade of Guards. Lower down in the case he found a Rifle Brigade blazer and a Royal Artillery silk square. An all-round man, the Major.

His next call was the galley. The Breton cook, twenty stone of well-laid yellow fat, was in a temper. He had been in a difficult mood ever since the company had come on board at tea-time, and had been made no pleasanter by a criticism of his gâteaux uttered by Mrs. Corret and incautiously passed on to him by the steward.

He was chopping carrots with a very heavy, very sharp knife, and looking as if he wished it was Mrs. Corret's fingers that he was shortening. "Any further grunts from the sty?" he inquired gracefully.

"They're drinking now."

"And soon they will stop drinking and start—" The cook

employed a farmyard metaphor which lost nothing from being in earthy Breton.

The bell in the little pantry sounded. With a sigh the steward picked up the tray. It occurred to him to wonder if the job was going to be as amusing as it had seemed when he was offered it.

At ten o'clock, on the top of the tide, the mooring-cable was slipped and the *Medea* headed down the Solent. At eleven o'clock Major and Mrs. Corret retired to their cabins. At half past eleven Marianne followed. The steward, who happened to be in the companion-way outside the saloon, held open her cabin door for her and was rewarded, this time, with a smile. A minute later he heard the bolt click in the lock. At a quarter to twelve he fetched a drink for Mr. Clinton. At twelve o'clock, a further drink. At half past twelve he found the saloon empty, cleared up the glasses, and washed them in the sink in the pantry.

The bell sounded, this time from the bridge. The steward frowned slightly, and made his way forward.

At the wheel in the small, enclosed bridge house he found the mate, Cairns, a monkey-like man who rarely spoke and never drank. The skipper was sitting against the side of the bridge house, his head on his chest.

"The skipper," said Cairns, "would like some coffee. Black coffee."

"At once, sir."

"And I could do with some, too."

The coffee took time to brew. When the steward came back with it, the skipper was stretched flat, his head pillowed on a life-jacket.

"The skipper no longer requires any coffee," said Cairns. "You may have the other cup yourself."

The *Medea* was dipping softly now as it cleared the southern tip of the island and met the up-channel swell. The twin diesel engines purred like cats with a full night's work in prospect. A big liner, remote but ablaze with light, snailed across ahead of them.

"You'd better get your head down," said Cairns. "You'll have a lot to do tomorrow."

By eleven o'clock next morning the steward felt that he had already finished a heavy day's work. The Correts had breakfasted and were reading in the saloon. Neither Clinton nor Marianne had appeared. The steward snatched a moment's respite to creep on deck and see just where the enchantress *Medea* might have set them down.

They lay in the land-locked estuary of the River Odet, half a

mile above the fishing village of Bénodet. The steward had never been to southern Brittany before, but he was aware of a feeling of familiarity. Indeed, it was more Cornish than Cornwall itself. The steep, high, enclosing river banks, close-carpeted with blue-black woods; the river, dark in colour, but clear; the glimpse of a grey stone roof among the treetops.

Came a pattering of steps on the deck beside him, and a body went through the air in a kingfisher flash of blue and gold, and smashed the looking-glass of the river. He held his breath until she came up, twenty yards nearer the shore. Then he moved.

Down in his cabin, a tiny cupboard off the pantry, he kept a pair of binoculars. His porthole commanded the eastern river bank, and presently he picked out the white bathing-cap. The girl was making for a wooden hulk, beached on the mud. She went on until she could hold the wooden stern post, and there she rested for a moment. Then she turned and started back, swimming lazily but happily, as if water was her element.

A fat laugh blew off in his ear, nearly making him drop the glasses. The cook, silent in rubber soles, had padded in behind him.

"Ravishing," he agreed. "But not on the menu for you, mon gars. Now, suppose we get on with laying the lunch?"

Clinton appeared in time for a pre-lunch gin. The steward was an adaptable young man. It had not taken him long to realize that if a servant behaved discreetly people would talk in front of him as though he did not exist. Perhaps he did not exist. Perhaps nothing was real in this floating world of silver and polished wood and old-young people . . .

"I've never been treated so before in my life," said Mrs. Corret. Her ugly little mouth was well shaped for sentences like that. "What do they suppose we are? A boatload of weekend trippers?"

"Hardly, my dear. Hardly," said her husband.

"Then why should they come to my cabin this morning, when I was barely out of it, and search my luggage? They were there for an hour."

"You were lucky," said Clinton. "*I* was still in bed."

"Bit unusual, isn't it?" said the Major.

"The routine varies," said Clinton. "They're well within their rights, of course. Bénodet's a customs station. But it's the first time I've known them search the baggage."

"And what's this about not going ashore?"

"I think there's been some confusion over that," said Clinton. "A message from Paris, that's been misunderstood. It will all be cleared up by tonight, I'm sure."

" Meanwhile," said the girl, " I am the only one of you whose feet have touched the soil of France. And very muddy soil it was." She wriggled her bare toes in her sandals.

" They're not being unreasonable," said Clinton. " I told them the cook would have to go ashore for stores this afternoon. They raised no objection."

" Decent of them," drawled the Major.

The steward made a mental note. He would have to see whether he could go with the cook. Actually it was quite easy. The cook raised no objection. He appeared to have taken a liking to the steward.

They put two large store baskets into the dinghy and rowed the half mile downstream to the ferry and the landing-stage. The cook, for all his bulk, handled the oars daintily; every time he leaned forward at the top of his stroke his singlet gapped away from his chest and showed the words *Toto Chérie* in startling purple relief.

They tied up below the Bac and went ashore. It took an hour to find all the fruit and vegetables and fish they wanted. At the end of it the cook headed for a fisherman's bistro near the port.

" But I ought to be serving tea," said the steward.

" Let the pigs forage for themselves," said the cook. " I require a drink."

It was a small, dark place, which looked like a general store, but had a bar tucked away at one end. The cook ordered pine-apple squash and rum, which he mixed together and drank with slow enjoyment. The steward had a cup of gritty chocolate. As they were finishing, the man behind the bar said something in the harsh local dialect and the cook hauled himself up and rolled across. For a minute the conversation continued.

The bulk of the cook obscured the space in front of him, but it seemed to the steward that something was being pushed across the zinc counter. He got to his feet and moved over. The cook's big hand closed on something. It looked like a flat packet of cigarettes. The next moment it was gone.

" Really," said the steward, " it is past five."

" Let us go then," agreed the cook.

Nothing was said as they walked back to the dinghy. Nothing as the cook bent again to the oars. As they neared the yacht, however, he paused for a moment in his labours and said, " Nothing, I suggest, need be mentioned of a visit to the bistro."

" I agree, of course," said the steward solemnly. Nevertheless, he seemed to be deeply preoccupied.

So much so that he made several mistakes in serving drinks that evening and was pulled up sharply by Clinton. There was

a feeling of tension in the saloon, which was not improved by the fact that general permission to land, though expected, had not yet been received. When, at last, the steward got to bed, he did something he had never done before. He slipped home the bolt on the door of the little steel cupboard where he slept.

Next morning the atmosphere was lightened. A customs officer arrived, full of smiles and apologies. A grave mistake had been made. Of course the passengers might land.

It was too late to organize a lunch ashore, but a picnic tea was packed by the steward into a hamper and lowered into the dinghy. He had half expected that he would be detailed to accompany the party, but in the end it was one of the deck-hands who rowed them to the jetty at the foot of the wooded slope and shouldered the basket as the party set out on the winding path, the girl running ahead, and disappeared into the bluey-green of the woods.

The steward had out his useful glasses and watched them as they went. His attitude seemed to suggest that he felt some crisis in his affairs to be approaching.

But for the next hour frustration awaited him at every turn. Three times he found himself outside Marianne's cabin, and three times he was interrupted. First it was the Captain, who wanted his shoes cleaned. Then the engineer appeared from the depths and demanded hot water.

Then the cook wanted to borrow a cup and saucer from the saloon crockery, which was the steward's department. He indicated the empty shelf where the white kitchen crockery, fat cups and thick, plain plates and saucers, had been stored. "The pigs," he said, "have taken it for their picnic. Am I therefore to be without a cup of coffee?" The steward unlocked the saloon china cupboard and got out two cups. He felt in need of some coffee himself.

The fourth time he was lucky. All seemed quiet. He turned the handle and went in. The little room was full of the faint but lovely scent she used. It was as if, her physical self being absent, she had left behind a sweet-smelling ghost to watch over her belongings. The steward wasted no time.

He pulled on a pair of cotton gloves and opened the drawers of the built-in cupboard. Then he turned his attention to the suitcases crowded together at the foot of the bunk. The first two were unlocked and empty. The third—and smallest—was locked. The steward pulled out a bunch of tiny keys, selected one carefully by size and shape, tried it, and rejected it. He was neat, precise, and infinitely patient. The tenth key worked.

It was a dressing-case. At first sight he thought that this, too, was empty. Then he saw that there was a wallet flap inside the

lid. By its bulk, it contained papers. The steward pulled out the contents, and stared at them for a moment, the oddest expression on his face. Curiosity. Then incredulity. Finally, something which looked oddly like relief.

"So that's it," he said to himself. Carefully but quickly he fastened the lock. Carefully replaced the cases where he had found them. Quietly left the cabin.

He did not notice that the galley door was fractionally open. Nor was he aware that from the darkness behind it the cook was watching him.

The guests were back on board by six o'clock clamouring for attention. They were soaked with sun and surfeited with the unusual exercise of walking up and down a steep hill. "Worth it, though," said the Major. "Reminded me of the view from the top of Jakko."

Clinton, too, seemed in high good humour. He had ordered claret, and as he passed round the third bottle the steward was glad to see that even the Major's wife was drinking level. He reckoned that the red wine and the sun would work together to his advantage; and it fell out as he had calculated.

By eleven o'clock the Correts had rolled to their cabins, and ten minutes later the girl followed. Clinton lit his second cigar, called for a brandy, and settled down at the table with a portfolio of papers. When the steward arrived with his drink he said, without looking up, "I shan't be needing you any more. You've had a long day."

If the steward felt surprised he managed to conceal it. In three days he had learnt a good deal about concealing his feelings. He went quietly out.

In the passage he paused. From the nearest cabin came the sound of a reassuring snore. Under the door of the girl's cabin a light showed. Again he paused, then drew in his breath as if plunging into cold and unknown water, and knocked lightly on the panel.

With the slightest pause her voice said, "Who is it? A moment, if you please." Then, "Come in."

He pushed the door open. She was sitting in the low chair beside the bunk, smoking a cigarette. Her feet were bare but she had not undressed. She might almost have been expecting him. He shut the door quietly behind him.

"If you wish us not to be disturbed," she suggested coolly, "you had better slip the bolt. That's right. Mr. Clinton, who does not lack for persistence, usually tries my door when he comes past to his cabin."

The steward said abruptly, " This afternoon, I opened your dressing-case."

" Yes," said the girl. " You replaced the cases carefully. But not quite carefully enough."

" I know, therefore, your real name and your job. You are of the French police."

" And you, I judge, of the English police. What is your real name, if I may be permitted—? "

" Petrella," said the young man. " Sergeant Petrella."

" And there is another name? "

" Patrick."

" Très gentil. Pat-trick." She made two equal syllables of it, as if it rhymed with hat trick. Petrella thought it sounded delightful. " Now, how can I help you? How much do you know? "

" I know," said Petrella, " that the police of both our countries have been watching Clinton for a long time. I know that he is a receiver of stolen goods. That he specializes in precious stones. Some historic pieces have passed through his hands. He breaks them up. Sometimes the stones are re-cut. Then they are shipped abroad, in this yacht, and sold on the continent."

" That is all conjecture."

" It is all conjecture. If it were more than conjecture, he would be in gaol. But it is conjecture based on some remarkable coincidences. Half a dozen times, stones of great value have been stolen. Up to a certain date we know—we positively and actually know—that they are in England. That's the date when Clinton takes his yacht and sails to Bénodet in her. Then, a little time later, we hear that the stones are in Europe. It's as simple as that."

" Simple," said the girl, " but not simple. There are a thousand places on a boat like this where a few precious stones might be hidden."

" While they are on the ship, yes. But sooner or later the moment comes when they must go ashore. They cannot walk, or fly. They must be carried. And until your picnic this afternoon only two people have touched the soil of France. The cook and myself."

" You are wrong." She stretched out one bare foot. " I have touched it. And very muddy it was."

" Yes. I watched you through my glasses."

" Then you saw me using the old hulk as a post office? "

" I saw you do something," said Petrella. " But you were too quick, and it was too far off for me to be certain. That is why I searched your things and discovered the truth."

" I took ashore a note," she said. " Containing a suggestion.

It was not an order—I am not in charge of this operation—but I suggested that the embargo be lifted and Clinton and his guests allowed ashore, and I with them. You may be certain that not one step we took, not one move we made, was unobserved."

"Tell me what happened."

"Nothing happened. We walked up a steep path through the woods. The sailor—the one they call R-r-ron—carried the tea-hamper. Do you think, by the way, that he is concerned?"

"No," said Petrella. "We've checked on the crew very thoroughly. I think they just sail Clinton's ship for him. The Captain's an astonishing old soak, but I don't think that any of them, except the cook, are concerned. Please go on."

"We reached a plateau—an open space of grass, where there is a ruined church; you can see the top through the trees. In the middle of the field there are three stone pillars. They are common in Brittany. They are very old, I think."

"Dolmen stones?"

"Yes. We sat with our backs against them. It was very pleasant. We had our tea."

"Was Clinton ever out of your sight?"

"Not for a minute. He sat next to me. He was very gallant."

"I can believe it."

"So much so that he nearly spoilt my dress. He—" She broke off, and said, "Don't talk."

Footsteps were tip-tapping down the linoleum-covered passage-way. They seemed to pause for a moment, then passed on. The door of Clinton's cabin slammed.

"Really!" said the girl. "I hardly call *that* gallant. He might at least have tried the handle." She reached up her hand and clicked off the switch. Only the soft bunk lamp glowed.

"You were telling me about your dress."

"It was nothing, really. We were drinking from our cups at the same time. He leaned across and clinked his against mine—as if they were wine glasses, you understand. Only they were not wine glasses. They were common crockery cups, and they both broke. In a drawing-room there would have been a mess. In a field it did not matter."

A memory stirred. Something he had seen. In the galley, with the cook. "Common, white crockery cups?" he said. "With thick bases?"

"That is so." He saw the sudden gleam of interest in her eye. "Is it important?"

"It might be," said Petrella. "They are cups that the cook used, for himself, in the galley. Why should they be used for the passengers? There are plenty of china cups in the saloon."

She considered it, and shook her head slowly. "There is nothing in that," she said. "They would not take good cups. In case they got broken—as they did."

"What did you do with the pieces?"

"When we had finished, R-r-ron dug a hole, and buried the scraps. And the paper, and the broken cups—good lord!" He heard her catch her breath.

"So it's occurred to you, too, has it?" said Petrella. "What better hiding-place for the journey out? To bake the stones into the bases of a pair of thick china cups, and hang them in the galley, under the cook's own eye."

"You sound so sure."

"You saw Clinton this evening," said Petrella. "You must have noticed the change from this morning. Relaxed, at ease. The job done. It was clear that the stones had gone ashore somehow. And now we know how it was done."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to do some digging," said Petrella. "Where were they buried?"

"Under the left-hand stone as you stand with your back to the river. What do you propose?"

"It would be better, I think, not to take the boat. It is a warm night."

"Take this, though," she said. It came out from her bunk. An automatic pistol. No lady's toy, with inlaid mother-of-pearl grip; but a man's gun, in shining blue steel.

Petrella put it into his pocket. As he handled it, the metal was still warm from the warmth of her bed. She leaned forward, said, "Good luck, little Sergeant. Be careful when you get among the trees."

Back in his cabin, Petrella stripped naked. Then from his kit-bag he picked out and put on a pair of old khaki shorts and a pair of rope-soled deck shoes. The gun was the real problem. In the end he dropped it in his sponge bag and knotted the cords of the bag to one of the belt-loops in his shorts. It swung awkwardly as he walked, but the arrangement left his hands free.

As he made his way towards the deck he noticed that the cook's cabin door was on the hook. He looked in. The moonlight showed an empty cabin and an unused bunk. Also, as he saw when he reached the deck, the dinghy was gone. He had heard no sound but it would have been easy enough to cast off and float down with the current until out of earshot.

If the cook was already ashore he would need twice as much care; and twice as much luck.

The gangway, which ran past the porthole of Clinton's cabin,

represented an unnecessary danger. Petrella climbed through the stern rail, hung by his hands, and let himself drop. The water was warm to the touch. He drifted quietly downstream. The tide was near full ebb, and the current of the Odet was asserting its strength. His feet touched mud a hundred yards below the landing-stage.

The river bank here was built up with concrete blocks against the scour and he pulled himself onto them and sat, for a moment, to disengage the gun and get back his breath and improve his night sight.

Above him the line of trees was unbroken, but they were mostly pine and oak and he guessed that, with a little care, he could walk through them as quickly, and with less noise than on the beaten track.

At first it was scrambling, with hands and feet. Then the slope levelled off. Soon after that he saw dim light ahead of him: he had pushed through the last of the bushes and was looking out at the upland plateau which the girl had described.

Under the pale, full moon it was a place of ancient and potent beauty. The grass looked as smooth as a college lawn. In the middle stood the three crooked dolmen stones, throwing long shadows behind them. On the edge of the clearing, the old chapel, silvery-grey in the moonlight.

Under that soft light, time went back. Black shades of priest and congregation were moving in the doorway, and the lights were on in the chancel.

Petrella rubbed his eyes. Surely it was a trick of the moon?

It took an effort of the will to move away from the friendly shelter of the wood. The feel of the heavy gun in his hand helped him.

As he started to move, the voices started. When he stopped, they stopped too. He told himself that it was the noise of his feet, passing through the dry ankle-high grass.

When he reached the dolmen stones, he looked across to the chapel, but it had gone. It was hidden in mist, which crept up, unnoticed, to his knees. If it rose higher and thicker, it might be a nuisance. The left-hand stone, she had said. Petrella knelt beside it. A large piece of turf had been cut. It moved to his fingers. Needing both hands, he laid the gun carefully down beside him. At that moment he looked up and saw the cook, five paces away, staring at him. His hand went to the gun. A foot was on it, a booted foot, which stamped on his fingers.

As he cried out, men came from everywhere; from behind the stones, from the hollow in the field, they rose from the ground. Then the world stopped short on its axis and he himself was

diving, upwards and outwards, into space, towards the upside-down river of stars which formed the sky. As he went he heard shouts, and the braying of a siren but faintly, and more faintly, as he left the busy earth behind him and journeyed outward into space.

There was sunlight in his eyes when he opened them, and a very pretty girl in nurse's uniform was doing something to the slats of the venetian blind, and saying, " Only five minutes, then. No more."

Petrella turned his head painfully, and saw Superintendent Hazlerigg, with his bowler hat between his hands and a look of sardonic interest on his brick-red face.

" Where am I? " said Petrella.

" At Quimper," said Hazlerigg, " in hospital."

Petrella gathered from his tone of voice that all was well. " Have you got the stones? " he said. " What were they? "

" The Ladbrook emeralds, none other," said Hazlerigg. " Six lovely stones. But no thanks to you. Or was it? I'm not sure. This has been rather a muddled trip. As I said to the Commissioner, we ought either to have told you a lot more, or a lot less."

" You warned me to expect help from the French police," said Petrella. " When it turned out to be that girl—"

" Marianne," said Hazlerigg thoughtfully. " Yes. She's in gaol with Clinton. You realize she was not being candid with you? "

Petrella said nothing. He lay and stared.

" The papers you were allowed to discover in her suitcase—the ones that seemed to indicate that she was in the French police—they had, of course, been planted there for you to find. Not that we lied to you. There was help on board. I expect you realize that now. The cook. A very experienced hand. The trouble was, *he* hadn't been told about *you*. A bad lack of liaison. But he came to the conclusion that you might be on the side of law and order when he caught you watching the girl through binoculars. That was why he took the shore trip. When you insisted on coming with him, and breathed down the back of his neck in the bistro, he knew exactly where he was."

" If he knew I was on his side," said Petrella faintly, " why didn't he tell me? "

" By then it was too late. Clinton and his friends were wise to you too. I'm not sure they hadn't suspected you all along."

Petrella grasped at the disappearing skirts of reality. " Do you mean," he said, " that that girl—that she knew? all the time? Then why did she tell me about the broken cups? Why not just

send one of her own side to dig them up? Wasn't it incredibly risky?"

"It would have been risky," agreed Hazlerigg. "If the stones had ever been in the cups. But they never were. You were told that story simply to make you go on shore. But the cook heard it. He'd fixed a microphone in her cabin."

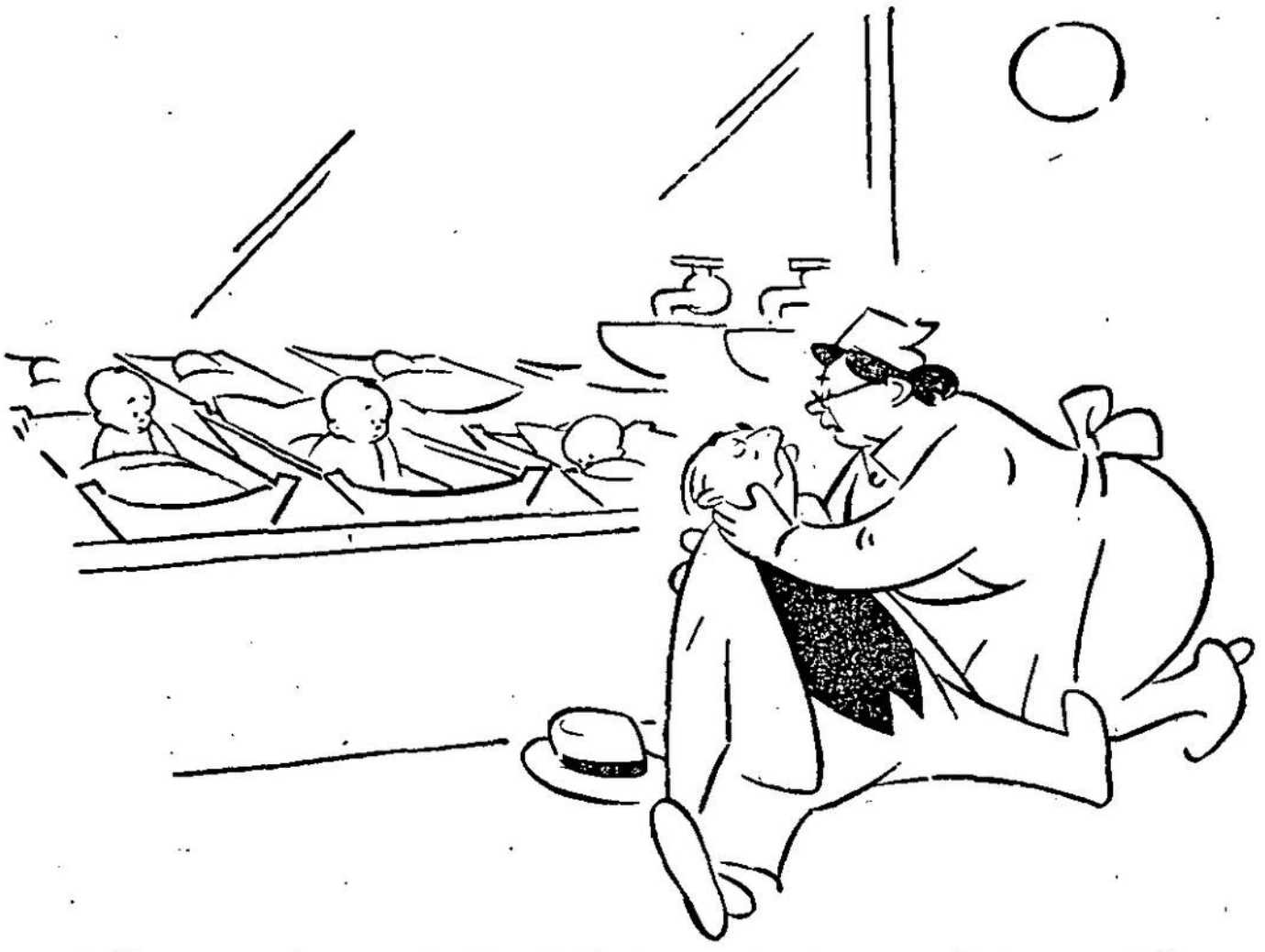
"He'd *what*?"

"He'd got them in all the cabins. I tell you, he is a professional, that man. When he heard what was up, he took the boat and went ashore ahead of you and tipped *us* off. It was a close race, but we got there more or less together. Not in time to stop you getting hurt, but in plenty of time to round up *their* party. She'd left a message for them on her early-morning swim, so they knew what the plan was."

Petrella said feebly, "I've no idea what you're talking about. What plan? How did the stones go ashore?"

"That bit was really quite simple," said Hazlerigg kindly. "*You* were carrying them. Six stones wrapped in cotton wool, in the magazine of the gun she gave you."

At this point the nurse reappeared. "Do you wish to kill the boy," she said sternly, "with your chattering? Out with you this moment! No, not another word!"



"Try to understand, Mr. Wiltshaw—they're not ALL yours!"

LOVE SCENE

This was what they had to forget
—and never would

BY MICHAEL FOSTER

AFTER sunset, the studio street was much more empty than the main street of any small prairie town where at least the front of the local cinema would be lit up for the evening. But at the end of this studio street, a dry California hill was briefly green with springtime, and in the silence you missed the pressure of crowds and noise, the great battering lights and the perfume and sweat and glitter, and the talk, the endless talk, of the long glaring day's work, now past. You weren't surprised to hear a meadow-lark suddenly sing once from the darkening hill.

A few belated figures were hurrying homeward, and a studio guard with a holstered gun looked suspiciously at Mark because he was walking slowly the other way. A playwright can be the most unknown guy on the lot, once he leaves the writers' corridors of the administration building. And to Mark, this weary errand was like a piece of business in some old used-up script of two or three years ago—some comedy, a bitter comedy, long since played.

He went up the steps of Sound-Stage 7. In a lofty, non-echoing dimness, he picked his way over snakelike electric cables on the floor, past the huge shadowy bulk of a London bus—a real London bus—past a couple of canvas chairs under the looming shadow of a camera-crane, and onto the empty set.

It was a glimpse of London, somewhere in the web of old streets down towards Limehouse and the docks, and it was the set where Katie Lurie was going to begin work tomorrow in a new picture. The part of a very young girl, he had heard, a part even younger than she was herself, and she had just come out from New York to play it.

He stood there alone for a minute, remembering Katie Lurie. With a wry twist of the mind, he took off his hat, and put it down on the shallow-worn stone steps of a mouldy old brick-fronted lodging-house. He put it at one end of the third step, close against the sooty iron railing. It was a hat he had carried round for a long time. He put his foot on it, squashing it so that it looked as if somebody had sat on it.

The dim glow of the corner street lamp would find it there tomorrow morning, when the set was lit for a fog-drifting night scene. Everybody would think someone else had put it there on still somebody else's orders, as part of the general human disorder of that tough neighbourhood, so they would leave it alone.

Except Katie Lurie. She would see it, and she would know what it was. To her, it would be hullo. Because the last time they had clung to each other, it was on a street like this, late at night, but it was West Fifteenth Street in New York.

He had kissed her, so gently that time, and she sat down to cry on the third step of their old lodging-house, and she had sat on his hat where he had laid it down. It was almost a new hat then, and, being Katie Lurie, she had jumped up with a gasp of smothered laughter because their scene had turned ludicrous, and that made it easier and quicker to say good night and good-bye.

Mark turned away from the London set and walked towards the door of the sound-stage, feeling slightly hammy. But he hadn't been able to resist the cynical temptation when Jake, the director, told him about this set. Katie Lurie would probably sniff, but she might smile, too. He walked back towards his office, along the silent studio street. It was nearly dark now, and the meadow-lark didn't sing again.

He went in a side door of the administration building and climbed a grey-painted concrete staircase. At the second floor, he pushed open a dull vermilion steel door and slouched wearily into the suave, sanitary glistening of the writers' corridors. Only two offices still had their lights on, his own and Sam Ransom's.

He and Sam had been working together for thirteen weeks on a script. Their offices were adjoining, and as Mark passed, Sam looked up from his desk and signalled him in with a saturnine eyebrow. The two men regarded each other coolly before both smiled, too quickly. Sam's smile was creased; somewhere round forty, the years of show business begin to leave their traces. Ann Templar was sitting on the divan with some of Sam's Scotch in a paper cup. She was the star of the picture Katie Lurie was going to be in.

"Hullo, Mark," she said, and sloshed the Scotch around in the paper cup.

He dropped onto the divan beside her, and with her free hand she reached quietly to tuck the point of his collar back under his jacket lapel, where it belonged. He was a bothered young man, and his necktie was often askew, too. Sam poured another drink, and brought it over to the divan.

"Thanks," Mark said.

Ann sat looking into her paper cup. Sam bent over to take it from her for a refill. His hand rested almost unconsciously for a moment on Ann's knee, and she gave him the cup. She and Sam were old working friends. Several plays, over a good many years, and always married to other people. They knew almost too much about each other. She looked up at him with calm and beautiful brows. He patted her knee absent-mindedly and went back to his desk to pour out.

" Mark," he said carelessly, over his shoulder, " have you seen Katie yet? "

" No, I haven't. Just haven't happened to run into her so far," Mark said, as carelessly.

While they were working at the same studio, among all the crowds and acres of buildings, the only place where it was hard for him and Katie Lurie to avoid each other was the canteen, at lunch-time. In that gobbling and gossiping mob scene of the arts it would be difficult not to meet, sooner or later. She had to eat there, because she didn't have much time, and usually she would be made up and in costume. So now that she was here, Mark had his lunches alone in a restaurant across the street.

It was better when Katie Lurie was in New York. When she was on Broadway and he was out here on the Coast, he found that strangely enough he could be more with her in his mind. Sometimes—not very often, not often enough to be silly—he would time her, across the continent. He never really meant to, but he would find himself timing the afternoons of a young actress somewhere among the streets of Manhattan. At noon here, in California, it would be three o'clock there, and she might be reading in her apartment, wherever it was. He remembered the way she sat with her legs tucked under her like a child, occasionally reaching out a long arm to tap her cigarette over the ashtray without looking up from her book.

This sort of foolishness was saddest for him in the autumns, when she had just opened in some new play. A taxi, the smell of violets, and the blue October dusk of Manhattan . . .

When they were both in New York, sometimes during these last three years, it was easy never to see each other. But when he was out here . . . When it was four o'clock here, with empty sunlight still in his office, she would be going down to her dressing-room in some mid-town theatre. A dressing-room smelling of make-up and work, of old cigarette smoke, of Theatre itself: the feminine fragrance of show business. And before his California evening came, a curtain would be rung up for her, back there, and she would be playing, delicately and intensely, forgetting all else.

He was accustomed to this other, this secret life with Katie Lurie; and it was awkward to have her here, beginning work three hundred yards away.

"Well," Sam said gruffly, "you ought to see her, Mark, to say hullo."

"Oh, sure," Mark said. "I will. Some time."

Those were bad, lame lines of dialogue, and they both knew it. Ann Templar knew it, too, and she took her fresh paper cup from Sam's hand without looking at either man. Because Sam and Katie Lurie were going to be married this spring, before they went back to New York.

Sam returned to his desk and sat down again in the pale blue leather chair. His dark, corded hands swept some pages of script and some notes into the shallow middle drawer. Then, pouring himself a drink, he leaned back and lit a cigarette. Through the haze of smoke he saw Ann's smooth head, honey-coloured, bowed over her cup as she took a cautious sip, and he saw Mark's thin, strained face, trying to look merely indifferent.

Sam thought that this Mark Conway might some day be a great playwright, finer than he himself had ever managed to be. Blowing out the match, Sam felt sadness for the younger man: for youth that must pass, for the work that is never so strong or so beautiful as you had hoped it would be, for the roads ahead, because he himself had travelled them but yesterday. The smoke of his cigarette drifted blue and delicate under his desk lamp, across that little pool of light. The smoke and the pool, at the end of the day, the only unchanging camping-place a writer ever knows. He, too, was thinking of Katie Lurie.

Two mornings later, when Mark opened the door of his own office, he stopped in his tracks. An empty milk bottle, washed very clean, stood on his desk. Anyone else, seeing it, would merely have supposed that this writer had taken up serious milk-drinking. But he knew what it was. To him, it was an answering hullo.

Actors and actresses come to work much earlier than writers, and Katie Lurie must have slipped into this building, up the stairs, and through the dull vermilion steel door to find his office along these corridors. To leave something that answered his sat-on hat. Something that said hullo to him.

The morning sun was on the milk bottle. He walked slowly, and touched it with a fingertip. It spoke to him of a bitter January on West Fifteenth Street. The old lodging-house of creaking halls. There was an evening when their elegant silver

cocktail-shaker was in hock round the corner, but they had remnants of this and that in four or five various bottles, left from more hopeful evenings when they had had theatrical parties once in a while. So that black night, at the sink, he had shaken up cocktails in a milk bottle. A weird makeshift mixture that didn't bear thinking about, but he had shaken it until it foamed, and poured it quickly.

With a far-away smile, Katie had held out her hand for hers, like a polite child. Afterwards, for dinner, they had only a jar of caviare he had bought Katie for Christmas, and twenty-two cents' worth of liver sausage from the delicatessen.

His first play had just flopped—the warehouse trucks came to fetch the scenery after five days—and Katie hadn't found a job since summer repertory. It was their first wedding anniversary, and they had been married too young in show business.

Silently, this morning, Mark pulled his typewriter nearer on its little wheeled stand. As Katie had gone to work with a hat in sight . . . They never did get their cocktail-shaker out of hock, but that was all right because there weren't any more parties.

A newspaper friend fell ill and Mark filled in for him on the rim of a copy desk. A morning paper, so Mark worked until eleven at night, and then up at seven to get the daylight hours in on a new play. With the unpromising morning sun of a New York winter's end on a dusty lodging-house carpet. And Katie Lurie making the galosh-slushy, hopeless, smiling rounds of theatres and ante-rooms. She walked as far some days as a postman does.

When the sooty trees of Washington Square tried in thin green to remember the forests—when a busted playwright tried to remember the Forest of Arden—in late April, his newspaper pal got well and came back to work. And Katie Lurie signed again for summer rep in a barn theatre up on the sandy beaches of Cape Cod. Little money, and he refused to live on any part of it. He would not go with her to finish his play on her summer's earnings.

He remembered the bitter quarrels, the bitter whispered quarrels in the night, when maybe both of them should have wept a little silently and in humbleness of mind; not just Katie. Those nights, he was not yet old enough nor sad enough for that. This California morning, on three thousand dollars a week and expenses, he remembered the small humble voice of Katie Lurie at morning coffee in a furnished room.

It was Wednesday of the next week when Sam broke off a story argument. Mark was striding to and fro across Sam's office, and from the blue chair Sam's eyes travelled to and fro

with him. His young partner was coming up with a grand dramatic twist for a weak scene. A fresh slant, a natural break. Mark was still trying to talk it out, stammering slightly, hesitantly, as he always did when he was working. He stopped walking and stood at one of the windows, looking out. He stood there for a long time. Abruptly Sam got up and reached for his jacket.

"Look," he said, "Katie's singing this morning. Let's go over and listen in."

Mark froze utterly motionless for a minute, and then turned slowly. "No. You go," he said. "I don't want to. I don't want to see Katie."

"Oh, come on, come on, don't be childish," Sam said. "We've been civilized and adult about this all along, so far. Now Katie's here. Now's the time to be entirely civilized. You've got to see her sooner or later, you know."

Calmly, without anger, Mark said, "Go to hell."

Sam walked across the office and quietly put a firm hand on his shoulder. "Mark," he said. "Come on, come on, kid, let's go and listen to Katie singing her big song."

Mark's eyes were too smoky, too distant.

Sam, smooth-shaven, long-successful Sam made a crook of his arm and shoved it under Mark's.

"Come on, you silly bastard full of pride. I like you, or I wouldn't invite you."

Mark pulled his arm away, and squared his shoulders. "Very well, Sam," he said. "I don't mean to be stuffy, but— Well, O.K."

They walked along the corridors, down the stairs, and out of the side entrance. The studio street was just normally casual in the sun, like any other factory street, as they headed for Sound-Stage 5.

Watching Mark's profile out of the corner of his eye, Sam thought: *Pride.* Against Katie. If it hadn't been for Mark's stubborn, too-young pride, they might still have been together, still married, and by the iron dice of show business they might have hit success together, not separately. And a Sam of this world would never have stood a chance with Katie.

With the wry thankfulness of a weary, experienced man, Sam had known this as long as he had known Katie—ever since the summer he'd seen her working in a barn theatre on Cape Cod. In an old play of his, of two seasons before. Ann Templar had played the lead on Broadway, which this very young Katie Lurie was playing in this little theatre for the summer.

Sam was on the Cape that June for a breather after the amicable

wreckage of his second marriage, and idly, without even much curiosity, he had driven to the converted barn one evening. But from an uncomfortable seat in the shadowy rear, he found himself watching the work of the unknown girl with the odd, plain name, and afterwards he went around backstage and introduced himself.

Mark, stealing a sideways glance, in his turn, at the face of the older man as they walked together along the studio street this morning—Mark was thinking how he and Katie had always admired the work of Sam Ransom, as only the young can admire. To them he was high Broadway. Once upon a time, and not so long ago, Mark would have been struck dumb at being teamed with him on a script. Now, he only tried not to imagine Katie's face as it must have looked when she met Sam Ransom for the first time, wherever it was. He didn't know. He didn't know much about them at all.

The night he said good-bye to Katie in the street, after the late, sad gaiety of supper uptown—the night of the squashed hat—his suitcase was already in a locker at the bus station, and he was leaving for Hollywood, on nothing but harshly gambling hope. Upstairs, amid spilt powder and stockings, her two suitcases were half packed, for Cape Cod, and he didn't want to go up again. He walked away with his crushed hat, without looking back—not daring to look back—and he had never seen Katie again.

On that first trip to the Coast, he'd got a second-rate typing-and-publicity job with a chain of suburban cinemas. That October, Katie had a stunningly good part in Sam Ransom's new play in New York, and Mark was frostily refusing to come back. They found they could quarrel as bitterly by letter, with as much hurt, as once they had quarrelled in the night together. Some time during that transcontinental fuss, she wrote him: *You can lift your chin in a letter as stupidly and proudly as a certain kind of actor can on the stage.*

He never told anybody in Los Angeles that the new young actress in the news-picture magazines was his wife. It was just as well, because she wasn't his wife much longer.

After that first Broadway season of hers, and after her unnoticed Nevada divorce—after that, Sam wrote her into his next two plays, and they were good parts. She was coming up fast.

Mark, working nights in a lonely room, had finished a play of his own; bitterly gentle and strange, something new in the theatre. From New York his producer friend had wired him: *Don't be a fool. Nobody can produce this. It breaks every rule in the book.* And Mark wired back: *What book?* Then

Joseph Thal read it, the meanest, most parsimonious, and most lavish producer on Broadway; and Joseph Thal fell for it. He didn't just produce it, he gave it what show business calls Production.

The next year brought a double hit for Mark Conway, and both his successes had outrun Sam Ransom's. But by that time everybody knew that Sam and Katie were going to be married. And show business thought it was kind of wonderful and beautiful because if any playwright had ever created a brilliant young actress, Sam Ransom had.

Today, in California morning sunshine, Sam now kept his eyes on his shadow and Mark's, moving steadily side by side along the studio pavement, but he said, "Mark, try to be O.K. when you see Katie."

"Why, of course, Sam," Mark said. "Of course. Why not?"

"She thinks the world of you, boy," Sam said.

"That's fine," Mark said.

At Sound-Stage 5, Sam threw away his cigarette with an inward shrug, and they went up the steps. All the people and the work inside were stopped between scenes. At the far end of the sound-stage, under clustered lights, there was a London pub interior, poor and dockside-tough, late at night, after closing-time. The working crew and the big equipment were silhouetted against the smoky light, and there was a good deal of half-seen scurrying-around and low voices.

Sam, walking easily in the half-dark, stopped beside a thoughtful, hard-faced man sitting relaxed in a canvas chair with all the movement around him. Sam was aware of Mark hanging back in the obscurity behind them all. The man in the chair turned his head to look up and said, "Hi, Sam. Glad you came in time."

"Morning, Jake," Sam said. The deserted tables of the empty and locked-up pub were still cluttered with glasses and ashtrays, as if from a long hard night of roaring and of laughter. Sam saw a man's crumpled hat lying under one table, and he thought what a good touch that was.

To one side, off the set, an odd sort of music was waiting—three violins and a stubby Irish harp. The low voices and the hurryings died away to an indeterminate pause. "All right," Jake said, not loudly, "bring it on."

A buzzer sounded and everything came alive with Theatre. An earnest, thin young assistant director dodged in front of the camera, briefly held up a small blackboard chalked: Sc. 23 P. 8, to go on the film for identification. Then he ducked off the set at a crouching run, and as if from nowhere Katie Lurie

wandered on, and the lonely music was there for her, out of the shadows.

Sam glanced back, over his shoulder. Ann Templar, in make-up, was standing beside Mark, and in the reflected lights Mark's face was chalk white. Slowly Sam turned his head again to stare straight before him, and after a second or two he was watching Katie. She couldn't see out past the lights to know that he was there.

In this picture she played the not quite grown-up child of the dockside pub's owner. A wistful and difficult part. A girl who had a sort of dream life of her own in the emptiness of that low and evil place after hours, when she crept downstairs to clear the tables after all the laughter and the bawdry was done, and all the people had gone away. Sam saw her give one veiled, slanting glance at the old hat on the floor, and he thought that was a strange and lovely touch of acting.

And then Katie was singing. Moving among the tables, her slender hands busy at first, and then slowing down as if in dream. A young girl singing to herself, in an empty place.

As the massive camera trucked silently nearer and the lights changed a little, Katie was somehow a creature of dark gold—to Sam, all the youth, the passing gold, of the world—and with the distant violins, the very old strings of the Irish harp, her voice was dark gold, too:

—The spring is spent
And burned,
But the blackbird calls
From the blackened thorn—

When Katie came off the set and bent over to say something, laughing, to Jake in the canvas chair, Sam had dropped back to where Ann Templar was standing. Katie saw him, over Jake's head, and started towards him. Then she saw Mark walking away.

But it was Ann Templar's voice that quietly said, " Mark."

He stopped and turned casually enough. Katie walked to him steadily and held out her hand, smiling a little. Sam saw the smile become uncertain at the edges and then fade; and with the heedless busy noises all round, Sam had a glimpse, for an instant, of the faces they must once have reserved for each other.

But Katie only said, " Nice to see you on the set, Mark."

" Yes," Mark said. " Good place to say hullo."

" How did the song go? " Katie asked carelessly. Even at such a time, no actress can resist such a question.

" Grand," Mark said. " It was grand."

Sam would always remember, though, the defenceless look

that had passed between them. He turned away, and murmured casually to Ann Templar, " Let's get out of here and give them a chance to talk. After all, they . . ."

" Yes," Ann said, without any expression whatever. " After all."

They went out and along a back way in the harsh sun to Ann's dressing-room. It was cool in there with the venetian blinds down. As she crossed the room, keeping her back to him, she motioned towards a box of cigarettes on the table. She had a look at her make-up, and shot a quick glance at Sam in the mirror.

Then she strolled to an armchair and they sat talking, about Broadway and the new shows coming up and people they knew; and then, after a while, not talking any more at all. They had known each other for so long. Sam stubbed out his cigarette three-quarters smoked. Ann was sitting with her chin on her fist. As he walked to the door she stirred and took a final long drag on her cigarette, but she didn't look up.

Going into the sound-stage by the nearest back way, Sam walked along a dim alley-like space behind the set, turned a corner—and stopped. In the massed patterns of darkness beside the set, with the diffused haze of the big working-lights beyond, were the figures of a man and a woman. Katie Lurie, with her face suddenly buried in her hands, standing very still. Mark, standing slouched, with his hands helplessly at his sides.

" So I guess we both have things to be damn sorry about," Mark said dully. " Things never to remember again. Except that we will, as long as we live."

Silently, Katie's head sank a little lower, her hands still covering her face. Sam had a sudden dull certainty—as dull as Mark's voice—that they were afraid to touch each other.

" When you wouldn't come back," Katie said, " it didn't matter what happened to me. Except my chance to work, and that was given to me with open hands, by a sadder and quieter man than you will ever be. And I'll never let him down for anybody. For anybody."

" I know. And I wouldn't let you, because I . . . like him, too. But I like you for saying it, Katie, for being the way you are."

Sam thought, how young they still are! When they get over it, he'll be a real playwright.

Sam took two steps backward, round the corner, and stumbled only once. He turned, more slowly than he ever remembered doing anything before in his life, and walked along the dim alleyway again and out of the door into the glare of sunlight.

On the deserted street he leaned against the wall of the sound-stage, with his eyes closed, for just a moment. Then he fumbled a cigarette out of the packet in his coat pocket, but numbly he didn't move to get a match out of his side pocket.

He knew what he had to do. He had had to revise many a play script in his time, but now he had to revise all Katie's years ahead: all she believed in, all her silent loyalties. His dramatist's mind, casting about, soon decided how to do it. It would have to have shock value, real shock value, to overcome Katie's loyalties. It would have to be definite and shocking and final. He would need Ann Templar's help. And he would need the help of Alfred, the chief of the studio guards, an old gin-rummy-playing friend of his. He wouldn't have to tell Alfred much.

Sam tossed his unlit cigarette into the ornamental shrubbery. He went along and knocked on Ann's dressing-room door. She opened it and stood looking at him coolly.

" Ann, I'm going to ask a favour of you," he said. " A big one, Ann."

" Yes, Sam," she said. " Whatever it is."

Somewhere towards five-thirty that evening, Mark went into Sam's office with three and a half pages of script, a whole scene. Sam's desk light was on, but Sam wasn't there. Mark put the pages on the desk, and went over towards the window to wait. He was staring out at the long shadows, when the phone started shrilling in his own office next door. He ambled along absent-mindedly, not interested in anybody who would be calling him.

But it was Katie. She spoke in a strange voice, in a very strange voice. " Mark? I think you'd better come here right away. I'm seeing things."

" All right," Mark said, and, realizing that that sounded too automatically husbandlike, he added, " What is it, Katie? "

" Well," Katie said, " when I was going through the gate—you know, the big main gate—on my way home and had a taxi waiting, why, a massive sort of guard stopped me, Mark, and he said, ' Miss Lurie, you've left something of yours on Sound-Stage 5.' And I told him, ' But I haven't been on Sound-Stage 5 since morning, Miss Templar has been working there all afternoon, in a crowd scene. I've been on Sound-Stage 7 '—you know, Mark, the London street set. And the big guard said, very heavily, ' Miss Lurie, I want you please to go to Sound-Stage 5 and find what belongs to you.' He was absolutely wooden, Mark, but he said it so *officiously*. So I— "

" Never mind the dialogue," Mark said. " Where are you now? "

" In a phone box," Katie said in a small voice. Mark felt an ex-husbandly urge to say, " I had guessed that," but he gritted his teeth, and Katie went on, " The one at the front of Sound-Stage 5. I hope it's sound-proof, and it's certainly dark enough because I unscrewed the light bulb. Mark, please hurry. While they're still— " She broke off, but he could hear her breathing.

" Now wait a minute, Katie. While who're still what? "

" *Mark, please come here!* " Katie said.

Hurrying to find her, he saw the green of the hill darkening again at the end of the studio street. He ran up the front steps of the sound-stage to slip in through the door. In the vast interior gloom Katie was waiting for him; she didn't say anything, she just touched his arm.

At the far end of the sound-stage, only a couple of dingy-looking lights had been left burning over the set, the dockside pub where Katie had sung. Sam and Ann Templar had wandered onto the set from somewhere. Sam had brought his bottle of Scotch along, and they looked as if they had been sitting there a long time.

They looked ghastly. Ann was still in make-up, from the end of the afternoon's work, but the make-up was smeared. She had flopped down at one of the convenient tables in a corner of the set, and Sam had dumped the dark bottle of Scotch on the table, and had hauled his chair round next to hers. He had one arm flung loosely over her shoulders. Sam's rumpled head was down, on his chest, as if in grief, as if in bitter grief and some sort of surly defiance, but nobody could hear what they were whispering to each other.

It was like watching, from the farthest possible seat in a theatre, the small figures of a man and woman on the distant stage, and they speaking only in muttered undertones and whispers. But you didn't have to hear the words to know what this was about. Every once in a while, somebody around a studio gets tight, but this—this was squalor. It also had an eerie quality, something a little worse than terrible, somehow, and that quality came from the smeared, ghastly-white face of Ann Templar.

" Now, Katie," Mark whispered soothingly, " they've known each other for a long time. They're practically old family friends, they've worked together on so many plays."

Katie said, " This isn't like that. What we're seeing is— "

" Go easy, Katie," Mark said. " Let's get out of here. Find out about it tomorrow. Everything will be all right."

She moved impatiently a step away from him. Mark didn't blame her. In the thirteen weeks Sam had been out here working

on this script, and Katie in New York, anything could have happened. Mark wouldn't know. But it was even worse than that. Ann Templar's voice rang out.

" So after all these years, Sam, another girl. Still one more. Well, that's all right. It's always been all right, always before."

She got up from the table, scraping her chair harshly back. Sam got up, too, and they both half lifted their hands as if to go into a clinging, tragic clinch. But Ann Templar suddenly bit her lip, and pushed him away with an unexpected gesture, violent and obscure. Then she turned swiftly and walked off the set.

Sam's face, at this distance, was absolutely impassive as he stood looking down at the littered table, but Mark was almost sure that Ann's, as she left, had been shining wet, all at once.

Katie was stumbling towards the door, groping for the handle. Mark opened it for her and they went along the studio street and out of the gate and found her taxi still waiting. As Mark reached in to give the driver some money and the name of her hotel, Katie leaned sideways against him, for a moment, but her eyes were wide and dry, fixed straight ahead. He knew enough not even to pat her hand.

" Please don't try to say anything. Please don't try to tell me anything tonight," she said. " Tell me tomorrow."

She got in the taxi and he stood on the kerb and watched it diminish swiftly away until it was lost among all the other pouring lights, away in the California evening.

The next day, after sunset, Sam Ransom was still in his office, working late. He was doing the last scene he would do on this script. He was standing at the window, trying to work out this last dialogue, and in an envelope in his pocket he had his plane ticket to New York. He was jumping an assignment for the first time in his life. His agent could square it later.

Mark Conway would have to finish this script by himself. It would be better. He and Mark had avoided each other all day, each with his own thoughts, but each hearing the other's typewriter through the office wall.

Sam, a harsh-lined realist, knew he was standing at the window to catch a last glimpse of Katie Lurie, in the twilight of this day. After a long time he saw her, and Mark was with her, taking her home. They went through the gate and stood waiting on the kerb, talking a little, glancing at each other, and her hand was unconsciously on his arm. But after a minute, Sam saw something rather odd.

Katie took her hand away, and from behind the wide flat

leather bag she was carrying under her own arm, she pulled out an indefinite sort of object, which her hands began gently putting back into shape, whatever it was. Sam wondered what that was about but he never knew, because Katie half turned, to look up at Mark.

What Katie was saying was, " Here. Put your hat back on."

Sam didn't watch them any more, standing there on the kerb, waiting to go home. As, in some city or other of show business, they always would be. Sam went back to his typewriter, under his desk lamp, and wrote a couple of lines of dialogue, fairly fast. That brought him to a break in the scene, and he lit another cigarette, trying to think how to get a hard and troublesome character actor off the screen.

Then he smiled, and slowly typed something. He typed a stage direction, one that he had read long ago, as a boy, in an old play script by some now-forgotten dramatist: *Exit, without disturbing the business of the Principals.*

When he looked up, his office door was open. Ann Templar was there. " Did it work, Sam? " she said. " I couldn't tell, watching Katie on the set today."

" Yes. It worked," Sam said. " I—saw to it that the dénouement with Katie was by telephone only. And very—well, short, on my part. After all, she knows show business. I was counting on that." He stopped; then said, " I will always remember Katie as being—very O.K." He stopped again. " And thank you, Ann."

Ann came in, smiling uncertainly, with only one corner of her mouth, but she didn't sit down.

" It wasn't hard to play, Sam," she said. " Except I could never hold as much Scotch as we pretended to." She hesitated, biting her lip again. " It wasn't hard for me to play," she said. " The main idea could have been real any time you wanted it to, for years now, Sam. Just remember that."

She reached out, and one fingertip barely touched his left eyebrow. Then she was gone, closing the door gently behind her.

Sam looked at the keyboard of his typewriter, and then he began writing dialogue again, not fast. Carefully. Thinking of Ann, so wise and so lovely. Ann, his friend. Meanwhile, there was this. Always. To make men and women talk, as in dream perhaps, but also in truth.

★ — ★ ★

CIRCULAR SAW

No man ever pulled himself out of his troubles with a corkscrew.

HIS HONOUR JUDGE TUDOR REES

OPAL CREEK

In the morning sunlight three men stood motionless on the brink of violence

BY EDWARD LINDALL

"SAY that again," Gay Ellery stormed. "Just say it."

Hackett Gregory stepped close to the anger blazing out of her black eyes. "All right," he said. "You're making a fool of yourself."

He ducked her swinging arm, came up under it, and grabbed her around the waist. He was big, this Hack Gregory, well over six feet, and wide as a door. And he needed all his strength to hold her, for she fought him with silent ferocity. But then he bent swiftly and kissed her on the lips. She lay still for a moment, returning the kiss as though it were the first and last she would ever have. Then she broke away and leaned against the cluttered store counter, panting and flushed, the back of one hand pressed against her mouth. "You lout," she said scathingly. "You hulking lout."

Hack's wide, freckled face became hard. "Keep away from Lew Kalman," he said. "Well away."

The creamy skin of her cheeks was stained with red. "I'm going to the dance with him," she snapped. "What's it to you?"

"I'll tell you," Hack said roughly, "so you'll always know." He paused and his blue eyes circled the lamplit little store, crammed with the tools the opal-gougers needed, picks and shovels and rope, things to work a shaft, tinned food . . . He turned his gaze on her, and levelled out his voice. "When I pick a girl to marry, I don't mean to let her make a fool of herself."

The colour ebbed from her face, making her eyes seem huge. Her body stiffened. "You had your chance. Before father died."

"I was flat broke then."

"And now you've struck opal you think you can buy me?" Her voice was toneless, almost bleak.

"No," he said calmly, "I'm not buying. Just taking up an option."

The redness flooded her face again and her full-lipped mouth clamped tight. "I even asked you to marry me," she said bitterly. "I *asked* you and you wouldn't."

"Look." He put out a hand to touch her, but dropped it as her eyes snapped at him. "Be reasonable—I was broke and you had money. You and your father owned this store. The only one on the field. What could I do?"

"I don't know," she said coldly, turning away. "And now I don't care. So long as you leave me alone."

He watched her go round the counter and past the old steel safe where the gougers left their stones until the buyers came from Adelaide and Melbourne. She kept her face averted, but he could see the clean, sweeping line of her cheek. The straight nose.

He felt a tenderness then and wanted badly to look into her eyes. They were something to look at any time. They had a sort of glow, like the stained-glass windows he had seen once in the Mission at Catfish. Except when they were angry: then they sparked like the biggest black opals ever gouged at Andamooka.

"You need someone here to look after you," he said. "Keeping a store, like this, in a mining camp, it's no job for a girl."

She wheeled with a lithe, flashing movement. The skirt of her light cotton dress swung and wrapped itself around her legs. "Look after me?" Her voice was high with indignation. "I don't need anyone to look after me."

"No?" Hack lifted a pick handle standing with others in a cask, examined it with assumed interest, and let it clunk back. "Anyone who lets a rat like Kalman hang around needs looking after." He stared straight at her, and added, "With a stick."

She started to throw her anger at him. Then she stopped and her mouth closed on the words. "Hack Gregory," she said, delicately and tightly, "you're jealous."

"*Jealous?*" The word gagged in his throat, the enormity of the charge threatened to choke him. "Of Kalman? That city lounge lizard? That . . ." He glared at her impotently, and her taunting smile stoked his anger beyond endurance.

He turned and slammed out of the door. His booted feet stamped away, hammering across the stony ground.

Moonlight lay over the diggings like a silver skin. It touched the earth mounds and windlasses with a strange beauty and even softened the ugly wooden shacks of the village. Across the flat where the shafts lay, Hack could see lights twinkling among the hillside dug-outs. He lived in one of them and they looked lonely to him now. Fat rectangles of light splashed from the half dozen houses of the village—and from Gay's living-room behind the general store.

Hack looked at that for a moment, his mouth twisted in an odd smile. Then he threaded through the diggings, scrunched across the dry pebble bed of Opal Creek and was home. Home. He

hunched on the edge of his bunk, glaring around the dug-out, hating its white sandstone walls and the rough packing-case furniture that he had never even noticed before.

His shaft was down into painted boulders now and he was finding good opal. Plenty of it. Tomorrow the buyers were coming on the mail truck, loaded with cash, and a good slice of it for him. But the excitement he had expected through the months of work had turned stale in his mouth. He felt empty and flat. Disillusioned. He couldn't even begin to understand how Gay could fall for the obvious blandishments of Lew Kalman.

His expression hardened now as he thought about Kalman and his partner, Reilly, who lived in the next dug-out. They had drifted in two weeks ago in a big American car, bought a half-worked shaft, and proceeded to scratch around it. There was something strange about them that he didn't like.

It was nothing that he could put a finger on. But they were the sort of neighbours that he would gladly have traded for a nest of tiger snakes.

In the morning he woke thinking of Gay Ellery and the way she smiled at Kalman. He lay on his back, staring at the sagging roof, feeling the emptiness in him again. Then his nerves jumped. He heard a flat, clanging noise outside, like a handle falling back against a bucket. He crossed swiftly to the doorway.

"Just borrowing some water," Kalman grinned, his black hairline moustache aslant. "I've still got this washing habit I picked up in the city."

Hack's blue eyes narrowed. He felt his hands ball into fists and put them behind his back. "There's a well down the creek," he growled.

"Don't worry," Kalman said easily. He picked up the bucket. "I'll bring you some later."

"There's one thing you don't do in this country," Hack rapped at him. "You don't take another man's water . . . . You don't even ask for it."

Kalman put down the bucket and stood erect, with both hands on his hips. He was as tall as Hack Gregory, but not nearly so broad. He'd be maybe twenty pounds lighter. But he looked fast and well balanced, as though he could make a quick getaway. There was a slight cast in his left eye and it gave him a mean look. His mouth was so thin it was almost lipless.

"It's sure good to have a neighbour," he rasped. "Someone to put me right."

Out of the corner of his eye, Hack saw Reilly emerge from the next dug-out. A short, squat man with bow legs and a flat,

impassive face. It had a faintly Chinese look. Hack moved slightly to one side so that he could watch them both.

"Maybe you met me too late," he said grimly.

Kalman darted a quick look at Reilly. His thin mouth sneered. "I guess not," he said. "The way I see it, we met you just in time."

Reilly snickered. A high-pitched little noise. "Stealin' water," he said. "At your age."

"Borrowing," Kalman corrected, heavily. "And it's not funny. Our manners been getting real bad lately." He poured the water back into the butt.

Hack watched him, keeping a tight rein on his anger, conscious of a vague disquiet. There was something about the way they acted. A hint of patronage. As though they thought they could afford to let him get away with this now.

"Comin' to the dance tonight?" Kalman asked, turning from the butt. "They got a squeeze-box and two kegs of beer."

It was said so smoothly that Hack knew it was intended to goad him. It did, but he managed to keep it from showing. "No," he said carelessly, "I've been to buyers' dances before."

Kalman raised his eyebrows. "It won't be real without you." He sliced a hand, palm uppermost, through the air. "They tell me you'll be top money-man this season."

"Yeah?" Hack watched a small patch on Kalman's chin where the razor had missed. He wondered what it would feel like against his knuckles.

"Yeah," Kalman said, keeping just this side of outright mimicry. "What're you going to do that's better than dancing —in a dump like this?"

The vague disquiet that Hack had felt became sharp and urgent then. Something started clicking in the back of his mind, like a Geiger counter. There was a strange watchfulness in Kalman's eyes when he asked the question. And it didn't go with the careless way he tried to throw the words out.

"Reading," Hack grunted. "I got some mining books up last mail."

Kalman stared hard for a while, then broke it off suddenly. "Pity," he laughed, "I was goin' to save you a dance, too. With Gay Ellery."

Hack almost heard whatever it was that snapped in his brain then. He lunged forward, arms swinging in a fury that wanted to feel the crunch of flesh and bone, that wanted to smash that sneering look from Kalman's face. He saw Kalman step back quickly, then to one side . . .

"Hold it," a voice snapped, "or I'll blow you apart."

The voice was Reilly's. Its viciousness stopped Hack dead in his tracks. He swung his head and Reilly was off to one side, his right hand all knuckles and heavy pistol. There was a look on his face that prayed for Hack to keep moving so he could squeeze the trigger.

" Put that away," Kalman snapped.

Reilly hesitated a moment, glaring, then stuffed the pistol inside his shirt. " Did you *want* to get beaten up? " he grated. " I didn't know."

" Shut up," Kalman said harshly. He turned, forcing a grin that didn't go with the look in his eyes. " I apologize for that." He shrugged, insolently. " Reilly gets carried away."

" He'll get carried away, all right," Hack said flatly. " Carried for the last time if he turns a gun on me again."

The three men stood in the fresh morning sunlight, moving slowly back from the brink of violence. Hack had his own rage under control again and could study the others. Reilly was sullen; but he didn't matter. He was only the stooge. Kalman was the brains of whatever they were, and the hatred in his eyes was implacable. A chill of something evil hung in the air. Yet Hack was certain Kalman would do almost anything in his determination to avoid action at that moment.

" Well, so long, pal," Kalman said at last. " Don't let those buyers trim you."

The gouging-pick was heavy in Hack's big hands that morning. He worked at the bottom of his shaft, about thirty feet down, his eyes watching for opal but his mind striving to isolate and identify the evil he had sensed so strongly in his clash with Kalman and Reilly.

Gradually he eliminated his impressions and dislikes, until only one thing remained that wouldn't be explained away. He couldn't get the pistol out of his thoughts. Not just the fact that Reilly carried one, but the way he had handled it. The slick, professional way he had whipped it out—like a man using the tools of his trade.

Hack put the pick down carefully then, a grim, hard look battening his mouth. Tools of trade. The unspoken words ripened a conviction in his mind, drawing into one neat pattern all the details it had stored since Kalman and Reilly had arrived.

He stood motionless a long time, checking and rechecking, but it only served to strengthen his conviction. Kalman and Reilly had come to Andamooka to snatch a fortune. Someone else's fortune. It all added up. It explained their lack of interest in their shaft and justified his antagonism.

The store safe would be crammed with precious opals and thousands of pounds in cash tonight, while everyone celebrated in a little schoolhouse a quarter of a mile away. And Kalman knew all about that safe and about the store. His visits to Gay Ellery would have told him that. For the getaway there was the American car—faster and more powerful than any of the battered crates around the diggings. It was snugged down now, in front of their dug-out, under a canvas sheet.

Hack stepped onto the shaft ladder and began to climb. This was something big and he needed help. It wanted talking over with Jeb Pearce and China Hurley of the Citizens' League. He started fast, but near the top a new thought stopped him. What had he to show them—a pistol and a fast car? A skirmish over a bucket of water? a hunch? He shook his head slowly, and his big shoulders squared almost imperceptibly. There was nothing for it but to ride his hunch alone.

Early in the afternoon he saw a dust cloud whirl the buyers across the desert and dump them at the store. But he kept away. He wanted to talk to Gay. He had to make certain she didn't walk into the danger that would be loose that night.

When he reached the store and had sold his last opal, the gougers had all left and only the buyers remained. Then they went too, leaving their thousands in the big, old safe. And there was nothing but silence and the insistent rhythm of Gay Ellery's fingertips drumming on the counter.

"Why?" she said.

Hack made a knife-edged fold in his deposit slip, watching his big fingers slide along the yellow paper. "Why what?"

"You're last in."

Laughter puffed through the open doorway, soft with distance. A burst of raucous music. Down in the village the gougers were starting to celebrate their sales.

"I wanted to talk to you," Hack said evenly. "Alone."

"Talk on, then," she said. "Tell me what I'm doing wrong."

A muscle flexed in his jaw. He waved an impatient hand. "Let's forget the fighting. For now, anyway."

She watched him with guarded curiosity in her eyes. "All right," she said at last. "A truce."

"I'm worried," Hack said. He nodded towards the safe. "All that stuff lying there and no one watching it."

She leaned against the packed shelves at her back, relaxed and watchful as a cat. In the dusk her eyes were faintly luminous. "No one's ever watched it before."

"No one ever needed to before."

"Maybe I'm daft," she said. "Or tired."

Hack fossicked wax matches from his pocket, scraped one, and touched it to the lantern hanging above his head. The yellow light struck colours from her hair, revealed the soft beauty of her face in a way that made him catch his breath. It had happened often before, but each time there was something new to marvel at.

" I don't want you to be here alone tonight," he said. " I've got a hunch there'll be trouble. You might get hurt."

She stood away from the shelves and put her hands down on the counter. " Go on."

" There's a fortune in that safe," he said steadily. " Easy pickings. You could just about kick it open, it's that old."

" Agreed," she said tightly, " but how'd they get away? "

He saw anger kindling in her eyes, heard it in the tenseness of her voice. He knew then that she was ahead of him. " A fast car," he said bluntly. " You've got the only phone . . . They'd wreck that, get a start. There's nothing here'd see the dust of a decent car."

" Lew Kalman, of course," she said tersely.

" He's got the car."

The anger exploded then. " You fool," she blazed, " you jealous fool! " She pounded a fist on the counter. A bang of hair floppēd over one eye. " How *could* he get away? In this desert . . . through these two-shack towns? D'you think he could hide his trail? "

Hack's big hands flashed out and downwards, gripped her wrists, and pulled her halfway across the counter. His blue eyes flashed. His mouth was hard. " Listen," he grated, " after this dance tonight, you keep away from the store." He dragged her closer, hurting her wrists and her hips against the counter. " D'you hear? Go and sleep at Mary Pearce's . . . Joan Webb's . . . anywhere. But don't come back here tonight."

Then he loosed her wrists and stepped back, his big chest heaving under the woollen shirt. Touching her like that, seeing her lips so close, had fired all the desire he had held in check for so long.

" You—you ape," she panted, " you great, meddling ape! "

Anger blazed from her black eyes. Furious, desperate anger, and yet Hack sensed it was not for what he had said. The physical contact had touched her too, firing the thing she had sought to kill. He felt excitement deep within him, an excitement mixed with amazement. She had never been more beautiful. He watched her closely, conscious of the silence. Suddenly he felt contrite. She stood erect, tense as a spring, rubbing her wrists where he had hurt them, white teeth biting her lower lip to stop its trembling.

"Can't you understand?" he said gently. "I'm trying to help."

She gave a short, bitter laugh. "I needed it once. And you refused." She glared at him fiercely for a moment, then tears welled in her eyes. She looked away. "Leave me alone," she said, her voice breaking slightly. "Just leave me alone."

Hack wanted to take her in his arms, but heeded a warning voice that told him this was not the time. He turned, without speaking, and took himself away.

The moon was balanced on the desert's edge, throwing long shadows from the digging mounds. The air was crisp, not yet cold, and he could hear the sounds of celebration from the schoolhouse in the village. The throaty music of a squeeze-box, someone singing, and the muted shuffling of a dance.

He stood just outside the shadow of the store, feeling uncertain of himself for the first time, not knowing what to do. There'd been logic in what Gay had flung at him. Logic and common sense. It seemed fantastic Kalman should think he could win clear. And yet, Hack knew, for such high stakes other men had played more desperately. A sudden thought took hold of him, driving his legs like pistons across the shaft-pocked plain. This was his chance to settle everything. Kalman and Reilly were at the dance, putting in an appearance to keep the record straight. And while they were doing it he could search the car. If they had planned anything the evidence would be there.

He snatched a torch from his dug-out, crossed swiftly to the car, and slipped under the canvas. It was nerve-tingling in that constricted world, without a gun and without the hope of any kind of self-defence. He had to work fast. He snapped on the light, gave a deep grunt of satisfaction at what it showed.

Two bedding-rolls and a case of clothes lay on the back seat. On the floor, a can of water and a crate of food.

Then the beam picked up something on the driving-seat. A map book. He grabbed it, flipped it open at a turned-down page. His eyes bulged. He drew a deep breath, holding down the tension that threatened to overpower him.

This was the answer to all questions, the missing link. An aerial map, stretching from the opal field to Portuguese Timor and Indonesia beyond. The islands of the greatest black markets in the world.

Then he saw another map, pinned to the back of the book. A large-scale one of the land around the field, with a pencilled cross standing boldly on Hardie's claypan, about fifty miles to the north. A claypan so flat and so big a whole air fleet could put down on it and have room to spare.

Hack got out from under that canvas fast, and lit out for the store. He struggled to get his thoughts in order as he ran, trying to formulate some plan . . . Then he jarred to a halt, cursing silently, turned, and pounded back to the car. The first thing was to wreck it, so that they couldn't keep their rendezvous with the plane. He whipped in under the canvas again, heaved up the bonnet and tore the wiring from the plugs, ripping them clear away. Fierce pleasure tingling in his knotted fists, he set off again for the store. But caution whispered. Then it began to shout and he had to listen.

Kalman and Reilly were armed and he had only his bare hands. He could do nothing by rushing in. He had to play this carefully, and with their car disabled he had plenty of time to do that.

He grinned, mirthlessly, as a plan came alive in his mind. He would wait in the shadow of the store, watch them get started on the safe, then round up some help. Jeb Pearce and China Hurley had rifles; Bill Jimpson a shotgun. And the evidence would be ready for them—either in the store or at the gutless car.

The thought of Kalman's fury amused him, then he felt a twinge of regret. He would have liked just one chance to bruise his knuckles on Kalman's jaw.

Soon he was in sight of the darkened store. He dropped to a walk, slowed, and began to creep forward silently, feeling dreadfully exposed in the moonlight. He reached the deep black shadow at the back of the building, turned the corner, and crept along the side wall. He stopped dead as a light flickered from a window just ahead. Hair-trigger tenseness gripped him, sharpening his senses and poising his body for action. He cat-footed ten feet to the window. It was open. He pushed his head up and peered through. Despite all his preparedness his pulses leapt. Kalman and Reilly were at the safe, piling bags around it . . . sugar, flour, anything to deaden the explosion.

Hack dropped down again. Noises of the dance came loudly from the schoolhouse, the lusty roar of men and women making up for lost time. He sidled along the wall, not hurrying because it suited him now to have them blow the safe. He reached the front corner and paused, preparing to move out and saunter to the dance, when a woman screamed inside the store.

A loud, piercing scream that chilled his blood. It stopped, suddenly, as though rough hands had choked it off.

He gasped in sudden fear. Gay! He spun round, raced back to the window, and went through it in a headlong dive. He landed like a cat, on all fours, bounced to his feet, and charged while his eyes were still registering the scene.

Kalman was holding Gay from behind, one hand over her

mouth and an arm around her body. He was dragging her, struggling, towards the counter. Reilly crouched by the safe, and as Hack closed in he turned square on, face distorted, and his mouth opened in a wordless shout. His right hand moved and Hack saw the pistol come up, saw a spurt of flame, and felt a hot wind brush his arm . . .

He jumped over the counter and his feet struck Reilly high on the chest. Hack heard him grunt with pain as they both went down. He drove a right to the jaw, grabbed Reilly's head in both hands, and bumped it on the floor. Hard. He felt the strength leave Reilly's body, saw the face fall slack.

There was a rush of movement from behind him. He threw himself sideways, twisted, and leapt to his feet. Amazement froze him there, balanced for action, and at first he couldn't understand. Kalman was hanging face downwards over the counter, arms outflung. Then he slid sideways and backwards and only a soft thump told where he had hit the floor.

Hack looked up and Gay was standing there, eyes huge and black in a dead-white face, a pick handle clutched in one hand. It slipped out of her grasp, and clattered on the floor. She swayed. Hack vaulted the counter and swept an arm around her.

" Gay . . ." His voice was harsh with fright. " You're hurt? "

She laughed. A high, giggling little laugh close to hysteria. " No," she said. " No. I'm all right."

He put his other arm around her, turned her towards him, and kissed her on the lips. At first they were cold and lifeless, then he could feel the strength flowing back. And as it flowed so his strength ebbed away. His knees grew weak and his heart constricted with fear at what could have happened to her . . . He took his lips away and held her at arm's length, losing himself in the softness of her eyes.

" Gay," he said gently. " Darling, I told you to keep away."

" I know," she whispered, moving close and dropping her head against his chest. " But I saw they'd left the dance . . . One minute they were there, then they weren't."

" You shouldn't have followed—"

" I was only going to take a look," she said, " but I must have made a noise." A shudder ran through her and she had to wait a moment before going on. " I'd just got to the door . . . was listening . . . when he opened it and grabbed me."

" Don't talk about it," Hack said. " It's over now." He lifted a hand and stroked her hair.

" There's just one thing," she murmured. " Something I've found out."

His hand stopped, momentarily. " What? "

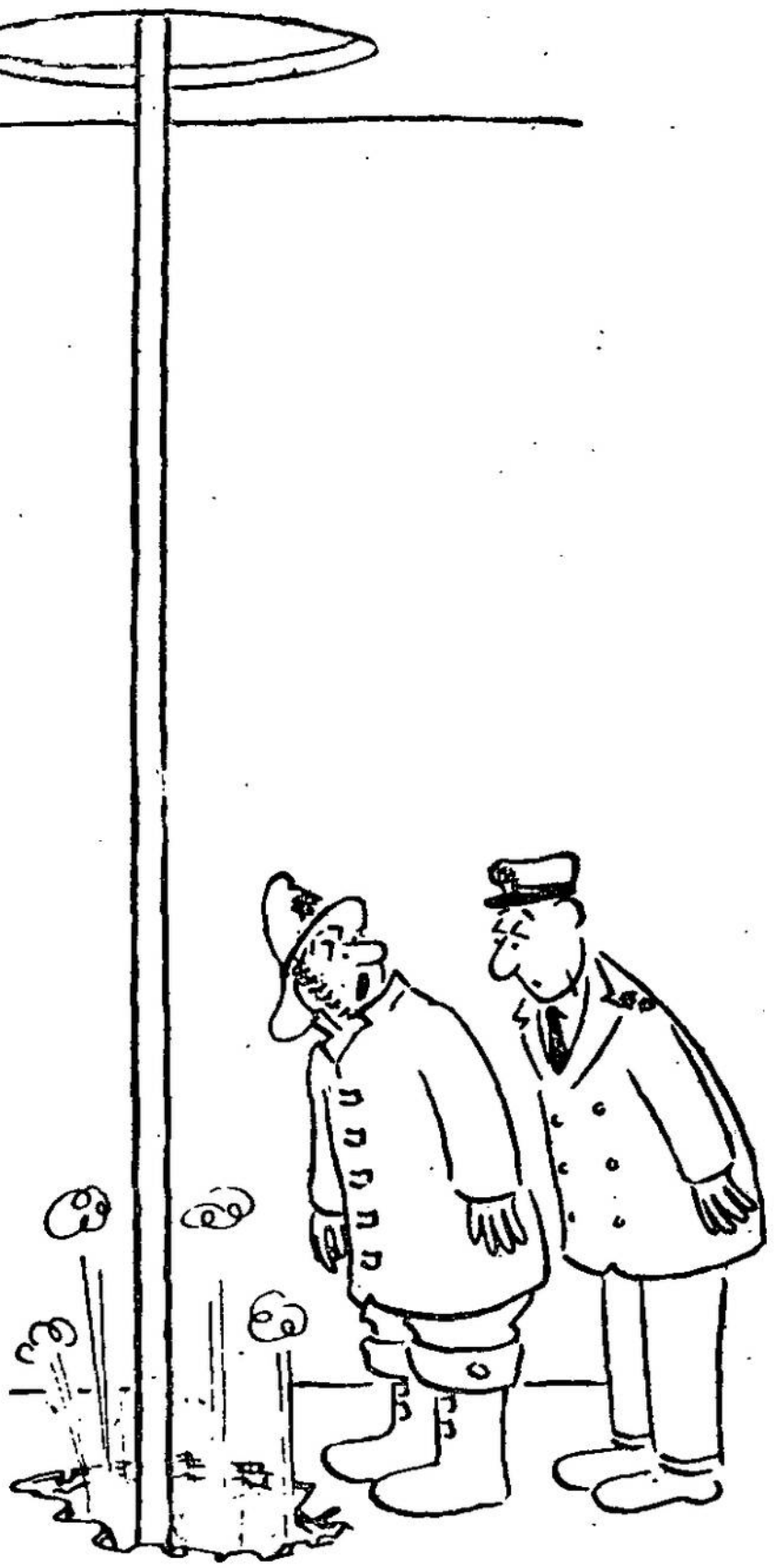
"You were right," she said softly, burying her face more deeply against his chest. "I *do* need someone to look after me."

Hack felt a wonderful happiness start singing through him. His wide, freckled face was lit by a smile.

"You'd never think it," he grinned, "the way you swung that pick handle."

She lifted her head. "I didn't know what I was doing . . . I was so scared."

"Sure," he said gravely. "And you only got one of them. I had to help you with Reilly."



"Dawkins will have to go on a diet!"

SUMMER SHOWERS

To some the pattering raindrops on the roof
Beat fairy drums . . .

BARBARA VILLY CORMACK

All night I heard the singing rain,
On early leaf and apple-bloom,
Like fragrance of a low refrain,
The lyric of a faint perfume.

And through my dreams it seemed to me
A sweet confusion, all night long,
Of music falling fragrantly,
And flowers that opened in a song.

GERTRUDE MACGREGOR MOFFATT

London Storm

There in the garden the bald man turned his bald face to the sky, Mrs. Peabasin in the next garden stood transfixed, looking up, her scissors half-cut through a clutch of creeper; perhaps half-a-dozen people within sight were struck in attitudes of stone surprise at this ordinary phenomenon of an English spring. Only the Average Housewife had moved instantly into action, already she had half her washing off the line, her mouth was stuffed with pegs and she threw more of these recklessly to the ground as she clutched at her white lovelies, her nappies and towels, to hustle them in beneath smiling skirts of safety.

Big single splashes dropped as from a leaking ceiling. And then the sky black all over broke, white hailstones fell dizzying as the lines on a television screen, big hard ice-blobs bounced all over the paved gardens, scattering cats, ringing on tin, drumming the gutters full, finally to lie drifted on paving and grass like the white confetti of blossom one might have expected at this time of year . . .

The brightness of morning, the flash of golden locks at the window—how could these have been? The whole day snapped out like a light at night: a dishwater drabness, drained of all light, gave the darkness the look of an old blurred photograph.

WILLIAM SANSOM, *The Loving Eye*

Rainsong

Aye, she minds o' a simmer's nicht
Afore the waning o' the licht—
Bairnies chantin' in Lover's Lane
The sang that comes ower and ower again,
And a young lass stealin' awa' to the hill,
In the sma', sma' rain.

Oh! lass, your lips were flamin' red
An' cauld, mist drops on yer' heid,
Ye didna gaither yon rose yer' lane
And yer' hert was singin' a sang o' its ain,
As ye slippit hameward, ower the hill,
In the sma', sma' rain.

MARION ANGUS, *The Lilt*

Rainy Season

I am at the edge of Mexico—I rush to the window. It must have been raining. It has. This is the rainy season, and it does every afternoon from May till October. The square looks washed, water glistens on leaves and the sky is wildly dramatic like an El Greco landscape. Half the male citizenry is unbuttoning their American mackintoshes and shaking the water out of the brims of their sombreros; the other half is huddling in soaked white cotton pyjamas, their chins and shoulders wrapped in those thin, gaudy horse blankets known as *sarapes* in the arts and crafts. It is no longer hot, only mild like a spring evening. Two hours ago we were in August, now it is April.

SYBILLE BEDFORD, *The Sudden View*

Handles to their Names

I never cared about dolls. When I was not amusing myself with the animals, I liked to play with umbrellas. They had, for me, very definite personalities. They were all grown-up people and I knew directly I saw them which were men and which women and I gave them names according to the handles, a smooth-handled one might be Minnie or Simon or Lily, a rough-handled one Margaret or Barbara. At any rate, a pale-coloured handle implied a name containing the vowels " i " or " e " a darker handle " a " or " o." Parasols were invariably girls.

One drawback to my interest in umbrellas was that I could not resist borrowing those which guests brought to the house and introducing them very politely to the umbrellas already living in our home.

Sometimes the guests were annoyed when they couldn't find their umbrellas, but often they were just amused.

MATILDA TALBOT, *My Life and Lacock Abbey*

Eavesdropping

Rain on the roofing slate
Tries to communicate
Something I cannot quite
Catch on a rainy night—
Something in undertone,
Told in a chuckling drone.
Under my soaking eave,
I listen and believe
I must have known rain's speech
Time out of mind and reach;
That when the world was young
It was my native tongue,
A language soft and slow,
Forgotten long ago.

ELIZABETH LANDEWEER, *Rain Talk*

★ *Argosy's reprint this month by readers' special request, is a skilled and intriguing sea story from the distinguished pen of "Bartimeus."*

COMMANDER'S WIFE

BY "BARTIMEUS"

CAPTAIN LANSDALE closed the novel he was reading and jerked it irritably across the deck of his day cabin.

"Bilge!" he ejaculated aloud.

He lay back in the chintz-covered armchair with his feet on another chair and his white tunic unbuttoned. The draught from an overhead fan stirred the flyleaf of the rejected novel where it lay. It quivered a little, like the wing of a dying bird, and was still.

Captain Lansdale wanted to dismiss the story from his mind, but found it difficult. His second-in-command had lent him the book. He said it was a very clever novel. It may have been, but Captain Lansdale had no use for that type of cleverness. He was, however, not surprised to observe that the Commander had been sent the book by his wife, a thin, long-eyed girl with crimson fingernails. She had scribbled her husband's name and her own on the flyleaf—*Jan from Tansy*, and a date underneath and an exclamation mark. Why an exclamation mark? Some secret they shared. Some laughing intimate secret . . . He lifted his feet off the chair and sat upright.

For a while he sat staring at the brass rim of the scuttle, which reflected the sunlight off the sea with a winking mesmeric effect. His eyes were blue and rather prominent; the mesmeric scuttle-rim gave them a fixed glassiness, like marbles. The dome of his head was almost bald and he grew his hair long to cover it. Sometimes when he was reading prayers to the ship's company on the quarter-deck the wind caught these long wisps and lifted them a little. The older members of the ship's company called them frapping-lines.

Why did women paint their lips and fingernails crimson? It was, he thought, a disgusting fashion. It made them look as if they had dipped their fingernails in blood and then wiped them

on their lips. Certain types of women did it. Types he disapproved of. Mrs. Keeling, the Commander's wife, for instance. His wife disapproved of her, too. "Modern," was her verdict when the Keelings first came to call. She meant more than she said. He agreed. He said nothing about the faintly disturbing effect of her long, green, slightly oblique eyes.

Almost from the moment he set eyes on her he could feel a subtle antagonism between them. She resented something. He had given her a cool stare of disapproval, because—well, he did disapprove of her. Her eyes defied him, and then her smile had mocked him. Mocked him with her inaccessibility. She had read something in his stare besides disapproval; something forbidden that flashed through his thoughts and escaped. No woman he had ever met had affected him like that. Extraordinary to think that all the time that conventional tea party was in progress, while they passed teacups and chatted, politely formal, this conflict should have been going on in the troubled depths of their consciousness.

He wondered uneasily what had brought it all back to him. He supposed it was the novel. A most improper book . . . ! Supposing his wife had sent him a book like that! He would have been appalled. He rose restlessly to his feet. Was it the book or . . . . Could it be that the tropics were getting him down? That was rubbish. He had had more years of the tropics than he cared to count, and he had nothing with which to reproach himself. Nothing . . . He picked up the book and stood looking at the inscription on the flyleaf.

Jan from Tansy. Tansy. A strange name. And that enigmatic exclamation mark . . . it was like a note of laughter. Derisive laughter. He could almost hear it ringing in his ears. Her eyes slanted when she laughed. He remembered her saying something about a Russian grandmother. The Russians were a queer people. Immoral. Not that Mrs. Keeling . . .

His glance wandered from the date she had written to the calendar above his desk. Odd, but it was today. He closed the book and thrust it into the bookshelf. He would give it back to the Commander that evening. Perhaps say something to indicate that he didn't approve of his second-in-command's taste in literature. Or rather the taste of his second-in-command's wife, whose fingernails offended him in some obscure way. He walked to the door of his cabin and stepped out on to the quarter-deck.

The hands were "making and mending," and there was nobody on the quarter-deck except the officer of the watch, who was watching something ashore through his telescope.

Captain Lansdale stood for a moment staring at the island in

whose lee he had anchored the previous afternoon. It was a low-lying coral atoll with a fringe of palm trees along the edge of the beach. His orders had been to look in there on his way to the base. The Commander-in-Chief had information that schooners employed in illicit drug-running called there.

Actually there was a schooner in the harbour when the cruiser arrived. Captain Lansdale sent the officer of the guard and an armed boat's crew to search her. Rather a high-handed proceeding, but he wasn't concerned with the susceptibilities of the schooner's coloured crew. Actually they were too startled and alarmed to protest.

Of course the search-party found nothing on board except a harmless cargo of copra, and in the dawn she shook out her sails and slipped away below the horizon.

Captain Lansdale intended to remain at anchor for a couple of days to give the engine-room complement a stand-easy, because they had had rather a lot of sea time lately. There was nothing to do ashore. A few officers and some of the younger members of the ship's company had landed to bathe and picnic. The remainder were stretched out under the awnings asleep.

He walked to the gangway and looked out to seaward. The sky was cloudless and reflected a deep indigo in the water that stretched, ruffled by a gentle breeze, to the arc of the horizon. Here and there a line of reefs showed purple through the blue. They stretched for several miles in the direction he was looking. Except the island off which they were anchored nothing was visible; no ship moved across the blue disk of the sea, no smoke stained the clear curve of the horizon. The nearest land was, he knew, seventy-four miles north-east of them, another coral islet like this one, a pinpoint in the immensity of the ocean. To the southward there was no land. Nothing till you came to the Antarctic.

Captain Lansdale's staring unimaginative eyes came back from the horizon to his own ship. They travelled over her foremast and bridge and the ship's side and out along the lower boom, where three boats lay at their painters—a motor boat, a cutter, and a skiff. The boat-keeper in the cutter was dozing, with his arms folded and his chin on his chest, his sun helmet tilted over his eyes.

The ship's bell in amidships struck the hour and Captain Lansdale glanced at his watch incredulously. Only two o'clock. He felt as if he had been sitting in his cabin for hours since he finished lunch. It would be another couple of hours before the ship woke to life again and his steward would bring him tea. After evening quarters he usually studied German for a couple

of hours. He was also writing a memorandum on the training of young seamen, which he intended to send to the Commander-in-Chief.

He had plenty to occupy him. But he was a man of regular habits and it was his routine to work in the dog watches. He usually read between lunch and tea; naval history and the autobiographies of eminent admirals and generals. He had read every book published about the Great War: officers in command of His Majesty's ships had, in his opinion, a great deal to learn from that class of literature and he rarely departed from it.

But that afternoon, because he had given the ship's company a half-holiday, he had taken one himself—if you could call reading an improper novel a holiday. Something in his reflections suddenly made him knit his brows with impatience. The thought of returning to his cabin was distasteful; it was as if there was someone there waiting for him whom he had no wish to see. Or rather . . .

He turned abruptly inboard and called for the officer of the watch.

"Get the skiff alongside. I'm going away fishing for a couple of hours. Have the mast and sail in the boat."

The Lieutenant, who was rather afraid of Captain Lansdale and secretly thought him a little inhuman, stood stiffly to attention, his telescope under his arm, and acknowledged his orders with a brisk salute.

Captain Lansdale walked back to his cabin and passed through into the sleeping-cabin beyond. He changed into a tennis shirt, grey flannel trousers, and canvas rubber-soled shoes, and finally slipped on a thin flannel blazer. From an assortment of headgear he selected a worn felt hat, and then, remembering that it was still early in the afternoon and the sun dangerous, changed it for a sun helmet.

His fishing-rod was behind the door in his day cabin, with a metal spoon attached to it by a wire trace. He picked up a box containing spare spoons and traces and stood looking round the cabin. His glance rested for a moment on the novel where he had pushed it into his bookshelf among German grammars and war books. He turned and walked out on to the quarter-deck.

Crombie, the officer of the watch, reported the skiff alongside.

Captain Lansdale went to the gangway and looked down at the boat. The mast was stepped and the sail in readiness for hoisting. There was a pair of sculls in her and the tiller was shipped. The side boy stood looking up at him, holding the boat alongside the ladder.

"Tell the bridge to keep an eye on me in case I want a tow back. I am going to sail over to the reef. I'll wave my arm if I want to be fetched."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Captain Lansdale passed over the side and descended the ladder. Crombie saluted and the quartermaster and corporal of the watch stood side by side at attention. The side boy took the rod and gaff and laid them almost reverently on the thwart.

"All right," said his Captain. "Hop out."

The boy obeyed. He rather hoped that he would have been told to stay in the boat. He would have liked to write home and say he'd been off sailing alone with the Captain. It would have been a good deal pleasanter than keeping the afternoon watch on a make-and-mend afternoon. The quartermaster was a Busy Jimmy who had come from a Boys' Training Establishment, and kept him hard at it all the afternoon putting an eye-splice in a bit of frayed hemp by way of improving his seamanship. It occurred to him as he reached the quarter-deck that he might write home and say that he had brought the skiff alongside for the Captain and that the Captain had admired the way he'd done it and said to him—

"Side boy!" The officer of the watch interrupted this flight of imagination, ordering him to nip up to the bridge and tell the yeoman of the watch that the Captain was away in the skiff and they were to keep an eye on her in case the Captain signalled for a tow back. As the boy trotted forward Crombie glanced to windward and asked the quartermaster what the glass was doing.

The quartermaster said it was falling.

Crombie strolled to the deck log and ran his finger down the readings of the barometer for each hour since he came on watch. He supposed the Captain knew the glass was falling. He had a barograph in his cabin and had only to glance at it. Masters, the Sub, whom Crombie had relieved at noon, turned over to him that the glass was falling very slightly. But the navigator had gone ashore to bathe and had glanced at the log without making any comment before he went over the side. Crombie supposed it was all right for the Captain to go off to the reef in the skiff. Anyhow, it wasn't his job to wet-nurse him.

He walked over to the other side of the quarter-deck and, raising his glass, resumed his observations of a native fishing in the surf with a cast-net. A little line of clouds began trailing up on the wind from behind the island.

Captain Lansdale, who, as a matter of fact, had omitted to glance at the barograph as he left his cabin, was skimming before

the wind in the direction of the reefs. The breeze had strengthened since he went into his cabin to change, and here and there a reef showed white for a moment as if the smiling sunlit sea had suddenly bared its teeth. He altered course slightly, steering for deeper water.

It was pleasant, he reflected, sailing away from the ship by himself. Perhaps he stayed on board rather too much. One got into a groove; a lonely groove, too. Captains couldn't help that; they had to make the best of it. The loneliness of high command. But he decided that he would go away sailing more often. He'd take the galley away and shake up the crew. And perhaps he'd have some of the officers to dinner now and again, two or three at a time.

He couldn't really afford it with three children to educate, but it would be a break in the monotony of his evenings. If he went down to the wardroom before dinner for a glass of sherry, he only made people uncomfortable; everybody stood up and the youngsters fidgeted.

Some Captains could do it, but they were on more familiar terms with their officers than he was. He believed in maintaining the dignity of his rank in all circumstances.

All the same, one could be too much alone, especially at his age. It wasn't good for the mind. It played tricks on one.

The boat heeled over from a sudden gust of wind. Captain Lansdale realized for the first time how fast he was travelling. The water slid hissing past the gunwale, and a reef, visible far down through the clear water on the port side, went aft and disappeared as if jerked from sight by an unseen agency. He looked back at his ship and the island beyond, astonished to see how far he had travelled. There was a change coming in the weather: a bank of dark cloud was piling up to windward and sending thin streamers of mist out into the zenith like the fingers of a gigantic hand. The brilliance of the sun dimmed slightly as the haze spread over the sky.

It occurred to Captain Lansdale that it might be prudent to turn and begin to beat back towards his ship. But they would see him and probably think he was afraid of the weather; whereas—he glanced again to windward—there was nothing to worry about. A squall probably, but he could handle the skiff in a squall.

He held doggedly on his course without looking back again. He was a man with complete confidence in himself. It never entered his head that there could be any emergency to which he was unequal; and yet he was not an instinctive seaman, born to it, as it were.

It was Captain Lansdale's intention to spin for barracuda along the outer line of reefs, but as he neared them he realized that he was sailing too fast for a fish to take the spoon properly. He thought that perhaps he would take in a couple of reefs, and began to bring the skiff round. A vicious gust struck her and drove her onto her beam-ends. For the first time he realized the force of the wind, but remained quite unperturbed. He got the skiff's bows into the wind, scrambled forward, and lowered the sail.

While he was knotting the reef-points he observed that the surf was breaking white all along the lines of reefs. He had passed the outer line; had, in fact, come considerably farther than he intended to. The sky to the windward was inky-black, and every moment the sea got bigger. He decided to give up the idea of fishing, and to beat back to the ship. If he got bored he would signal for them to send the motor boat and tow him back. He hoisted the sail again and commenced to reach to windward; then he realized the size of the seas. One broke over the weather bow, drenching him. He made the discovery that there was no bailer in the boat.

The yeoman of signals delegated the task of keeping an eye on the skiff to the signalman of the watch, while he leaned in the doorway of the chart-house and listened to titbits which the chief yeoman, reclining at his ease on the settee, read aloud from an English Sunday newspaper about a month old. The cruiser was alone in the anchorage and there was no shipping in sight. The yeoman's reading was interrupted by a sudden gust of wind that shook the bridge awning. The yeoman moved out onto the bridge and looked to windward.

"Here—what's the Captain doing?"

The second hand of the watch, his telescope steadied against the wheel shelter, said he thought the Captain was bound for Cape Horn.

"It's coming on to blow," said the yeoman. He turned towards the chart-house. "Here, Chief, what do you think of the weather?"

The chief yeoman, a stout man, rose with a grunt from the settee, surveyed the sky and the sea, and said what he thought of the weather.

"How about the Captain?" asked the yeoman.

"Keep an eye on him. That's his orders. We can't do no more. Get the big telescope on him."

They focused the swivelled high-power telescope on the skiff. The chief yeoman applied his eye to it. "Running down to leeward lickerty split. . . There's a big sea running out there.

He don't trouble . . . Can't he see the sky to windward . . . ? Here, Barker." He called the signalman. "Clap your face to this eye-piece and don't take it off the skiff till I come back." He began to button his tunic. "I'm going to have a yarn with the officer of the watch."

The chief yeoman found the officer of the watch staring seaward through his glass.

"We've got the high-power glass on the Captain, sir. He hasn't made no signal and he's still running down to leeward. The weather don't look too good."

"He's brought her up into the wind now. I think he's coming back."

Crombie made his way to the Commander's cabin, knocked and entered. The Commander, who was asleep in the armchair with a book on his knees, opened his eyes at the knock, wide awake on the instant.

"It's coming on to blow a bit, sir, and the Captain's away sailing in the skiff. Shall I send the motor-boat for him? He's a long way down to leeward."

The Commander rose to his feet, picked up his cap and telescope, and stepped out of his cabin. He glanced to windward. "Where's the skiff?"

Crombie indicated her with his glass outstretched. "He said he'd signal if he wanted a tow back. He hasn't signalled."

The Commander said something under his breath. Forward the notes of the bugle were rousing sleeping men. "Call away the motor boat and send her down to the Captain." Heavy drops of rain began to patter on the awning overhead. The duty part of the watch were running aft with the awning tackles.

"Here it comes," muttered the Commander . . .

Captain Lansdale, nursing the skiff to windward, perched on the weather gunwale with the sheet gripped in his left hand, saw the squall coming towards him. It was like a grey curtain of water that swallowed the island, blotted out the cruiser, and came rushing down on him with a roar like an express train.

He brought the skiff's bows round to meet the squall, and for a moment she plunged in the trough of the sea, with her sail flapping and the sheet flogging to and fro. The fury of the approaching cataclysm daunted him for an instant. He thought, "I'd better get the sail down and try to make some sort of a sea-anchor." To reach the halyards he would have to relinquish the tiller . . . As he hesitated the universe changed into a pandemonium of shrieking wind and water.

The next instant the skiff's sail filled and she heeled over, water frothing across the gunwale. Instinctively, the Captain

let the wet sheet slip through his hands and the boat spun round and went tearing before the wind. He held the sheet tight; there was nothing else to do; he'd just have to run before the squall till it blew itself out. If he left the tiller to get at the sail and lower it the boat would broach to and capsize. It would be all right presently.

The boat lurched forward drunkenly through the driving downpour. He saw that he must bail or the boat would become unmanageable. Water swilled about nearly to his knees, and he remembered he had nothing to bail with except his sun helmet. Holding the sheet and tiller in one hand, he contrived to get some of the water out of her, but presently the helmet turned to pulp and collapsed.

Contrary to his expectations, the squall did not blow itself out. His watch showed him presently that he had been running with the storm for over an hour and it was still blowing as hard as ever. Yet the waterlogged boat seemed scarcely to move through the waves; it staggered to the crest of each successive sea, lurched forward down their slopes, lolled half-becalmed in the troughs. But he knew that he was in reality travelling fast, away from the island, away from his ship, in a roughly southerly direction.

He found in time that it took all his courage to look behind him in an endeavour to sight the island and get his bearings, but he could see nothing through the rain except immense pursuing seas.

Another hour passed. The rain gradually ceased. There was nothing but the foaming pursuit of the wave crests astern, and a grey tumultuous sky.

At that moment the wind shifted. The skiff was poised on the crest of a sea and the wind beat the wet sail back against the mast. She spun round broadside on to the seas, and then very deliberately, slowly, it seemed to Captain Lansdale, capsized.

"It's all right," he thought, as he went under. "She has positive buoyancy. She'll float."

The Commander ran forward to the bridge as the squall struck the ship. The rain obscured the island from sight and there was nothing he could get a bearing from, as he intended, to see if they were dragging.

The signalmen had struggled into their oilskins and were staring down-wind at the driving deluge.

"Where was the skiff when you saw her last?"

The chief yeoman pointed to leeward with his telescope rather uncertainly.

"I suppose you didn't take a bearing of her?"

The chief yeoman admitted that he hadn't. The squall came so suddenly.

Keeling, from the end of the bridge, saw the crew of the motor boat crawling out along the lower boom, the wind beating at their oilskins. He snatched a megaphone out of the chart-house and shouted to the coxswain not to cast off. They must wait till the rain eased up a bit, till they could see better. Useless to send them away in this. Perhaps he'd better send an officer with them.

He sent for Masters, the Sub, and gave him his orders. "See there's a compass in the boat and take your course on leaving the ship. Keep a look-out for reefs. I'll send a hand to the masthead when the visibility clears a bit and signal to you if we sight the skiff before you do."

Keeling never doubted that they would sight the skiff when the rain stopped. He assumed that the Captain had hauled down his sail when the squall struck him, and just drifted. He had no idea of the size of the seas beyond the reefs, and although slightly worried, did not feel any serious anxiety about his Captain's safety.

Keeling's attitude towards his superior was one of uncritical loyalty. His wife, he knew, did not like her husband's Captain. She had said so as they were driving home from their first call. She gave no reason. That was Tansy all over; she seemed to get impressions of people through her skin. When he pressed her for a reason, she slid her hand into his and gave it a little squeeze. That meant he was to drop the subject, which he did.

He moved about the ship, busy with measures which the situation called for. The rain lessened after about twenty minutes, and he sent Masters off in the motor boat, giving him an approximate course to steer from the direction of the wind. Visibility gradually increased to nearly a mile. The island became visible as a grey smear to windward, then presently the cutter was visible, close-reefed, wallowing back to the ship with the drenched picnic party.

Keeling returned to the bridge and sent a signalman to the masthead with a pair of glasses. Every five minutes or so he took a bearing, and was reassured to find they were not dragging. Each time he turned from the binnacle he glanced up at the look-out, clinging to the Jacob's ladder on the topmast. Gradually the visibility increased. He could see the motor boat plunging away down to leeward. They'd have a dusting coming back if the wind held at its present strength. He could see the surf breaking on the first line of reefs to the eastward. They ought to sight the skiff at any moment.

The cutter with the picnic party came alongside. Crombie had the falls rove and the lower deck cleared in readiness to hoist her and the other cutter lying at the boom. Keeling hoisted one, while Crombie took the other. The men, swarming along both batteries, had their faces turned seaward as they hauled on the cutters' falls. They raced one boat against the other, muttering amongst themselves about the fate of the skiff. The boats climbed swiftly to the davits' heads. "High enough!" "High enough!" Crombie's shout echoed his. Keeling waited till the boats were secured and then went aft, to the navigator's cabin. He had been one of the picnic party, and was standing naked, rubbing himself with a towel.

"The skipper's adrift in the skiff somewhere down to leeward."

The navigator stopped rubbing a tattoooed arm and opened his eyes wide. "Where?"

"I don't know yet. Visibility's bad still. I've sent the motor boat for him and I've got a look-out aloft. How long do these squalls last?"

"Sometimes a few hours, sometimes longer. The glass was dropping slowly all the morning, but the sky was clear when I went ashore."

Hasthorpe began to dress quickly. "Have you taken a bearing of the beach?"

"Yes. The hook's holding all right."

"It's good holding ground. I'll be up on the bridge in a jiffy."

Keeling went out. The rain had nearly stopped and he returned to the bridge. Visibility was improving, but it blew as hard as ever. The signalmen were scanning the grey expanse of foam-flecked sea through glasses.

"Well?" he asked expectantly.

Nobody answered him.

His voice rose curtly. "Have you sighted the skiff?"

The chief yeoman turned a round, brick-red, solemn face towards him. "There's nothing in sight, sir."

Captain Lansdale rose gasping to the surface, swam a few strokes, and grabbed the rudder lanyard. The skiff was floating bottom up, rising and falling on the waves that every now and again rushed seething over her. For some minutes he floated, holding on to the rudder. Presently it slipped from the inverted pintles but remained secured to the skiff by the lanyard.

The skiff had preserved a certain amount of buoyancy due to the air imprisoned in her, and Captain Lansdale, mindful of the

possibility of sharks, contrived to pull himself onto the upturned keel. Some of the skiff's rigging was floating on the surface; he grabbed hold of the sheet and managed to pass it round the boat and secure it. It gave him something to hold on to. After a while he secured the end round his body and lay spread-eagled, clinging to the sheet.

"Now," he thought, "I must just hang on like this and wait till I am picked up. The ship must have seen me by now, and the motor boat will be on its way. It's just a matter of sticking it." He lay watching the seas as they rushed towards him.

He was very cold and his mouth was dry and bitter. He had swallowed a good deal of salt water, and at intervals he was shaken by spasms of retching. He wondered how many hours of daylight were left, and discovered his watch had stopped at a quarter past five. Say a couple of hours' daylight. Plenty of time for them to find him. He closed his eyes and held his breath as a sea enveloped him.

It occurred to him as he emerged from it and gulped fresh air into his lungs that the seas were too big for the motor boat. He must have been carried a long way out into the ocean. And now he was drifting on whatever current prevailed with that wind. He lay patiently, as if crucified, face downwards, trying to remember the force and direction of the currents.

He began to grow angry. It was outrageous that the ship hadn't sent for him by now. Surely the seas weren't too big for the motor boat . . . ? Perhaps the motor boat had broken down. Then why didn't Keeling send a cutter? A cutter could live in that sea all right, reefed down . . . Funny to think they could see him and he couldn't see the ship. But of course he couldn't, with his eye on a level with the water.

He rose uncertainly to his knees, gripping the sheet, and tried to peer over the wave-tops. He could see only a mile or two, whereas—he dropped to his prone position and lay shivering, his teeth chattering—whereas, from the masthead, a look-out would have a visibility . . . His brain became busy with calculations. Of course they could see him. He might even be back in time to have his dinner party. A hot bath and a good stiff tot of whisky would soon put him right. He began again to rise unsteadily to his knees.

Heavens, how his eyes smarted! Was that boat never coming? He peered blinking through the spindrift but saw only the brief tropical dusk sweeping over sea and sky . . . .

Hasthorpe, the navigator, came up to the bridge, glanced to leeward, and entered the chart-house. He drew a chart out of a drawer, studied it for a while, and began to make calculations

in a notebook. Keeling joined him. "How much more daylight is there?"

The navigator looked over his shoulder at the clock. "About an hour. What time was he lost sight of?"

Keeling told him. Hasthorpe twiddled a pair of dividers about the surface of the chart and made a little pencil dot on the surface of the paper. "Assuming he hauled his sail down when the squall struck him he ought to be there." He carefully enclosed the dot with a circle, as if that settled the matter beyond any doubt.

Keeling leaned over the chart. "Well, he isn't or we'd see him. I've been to the masthead myself and I swear there's nothing in sight." His round, rather boyish face looked anxious. "Supposing he capsized?"

"We'd still see him. The skiff would float."

Keeling went out onto the bridge. The motor boat was visible as a small speck at the limit of visibility. Through his glass he could see her rolling and plunging, seas breaking over her. Supposing she broke down? He daren't let her go any farther in this wind. He turned away from the rail.

"Hoist the motor boat's recall," he said to the chief yeoman, and re-entered the chart-house. "I must get the motor boat back before dark. I've recalled her. D'you suppose the Captain ran before the squall?"

"Must have. Visibility's what? Four miles? He'd be out of sight. He'd be—" again the navigator made a confident pencil mark—"here—about."

"We'd better raise steam. Can you take her out in the dark?"

Hasthorpe shook his head. "You're not supposed to approach this island at night on account of the currents. It's not lighted, you see. I could take her out as long as I could see the land, but not in the dark."

Keeling glanced at the yardarm where the flags recalling the motor boat were snapping in the wind.

"Motor boat's returning, sir. She's signalled nothing in sight," reported the yeoman.

Keeling descended to the wardroom, where he found the Engineer-Commander playing bridge. "Chief, how long do you want to raise steam for slow speed?"

"In an emergency? Three hours."

"That's no good. It'll be dark. The pilot says he can't take her out in the dark. We'll have to weigh at dawn."

"Right oh!" The Engineer-Commander laid down his cards and rose from the table. The other three players sat with their eyes turned on the second-in-command. It seemed to Keeling

as if they expected him to perform some sort of miracle—suddenly to produce the Captain in their midst alive and well. For an instant he felt overwhelmed by a sense of awful responsibility. Suppose the navigator was wrong in his calculations? Suppose . . .

"What do you think happened to him?" asked the Captain of Marines in a sepulchral voice. The Engineer-Commander had gone from the mess. The remaining occupants sat eyeing Keeling in gloomy silence.

He answered in a sudden unexpected burst of irritability: "How the hell do I know?" and then followed the Engineer-Commander.

The bridge players sat fumbling with their cards in silence, as if rather ashamed to be doing nothing to help find the Captain, and at the same time aware there was nothing they could do.

On his way forward Keeling stepped into the Captain's cabin. Captain Lansdale's steward was moving about in it uncertainly.

"Shall I lay dinner for the Captain, sir?" he asked, fixing eyes like an anxious monkey's on Keeling's face. "D'you think he'll be back in time?"

Keeling felt as if they were playing a sort of game. "Hardly," he said. "Hardly in time for dinner. We're—we're going to sea directly it dawns to pick him up. I expect he'll be very cold. It's been raining so hard . . . We must have his bunk ready and hot-water bottles . . ."

The steward brightened. "Yes, sir. And a nice hot cup of coffee."

Keeling stood irresolutely in the centre of the cabin. He must clear lower deck again presently and hoist the motor boat . . . prepare the ship for sea . . . His eye rested on the bookshelf, where he observed the book Tansy had sent him as a birthday present. He remembered that today was his birthday, but the book had come a week ago. He had meant to have a singsong in the wardroom that evening and ask the Captain to come down. The Captain of Marines would have played the piano while they sang the old-fashioned naval ditties and chanties the Captain liked . . . He thought it was a pity the Captain had no interests outside the Service. But then he himself had been like that until he married Tansy.

It was she who introduced him to really good literature, taught him to appreciate good music and paintings, insisted on their meeting lots of people other than naval officers, and widened his interests. He turned and went out onto the upper deck.

Dawn came out of a pearl sky, cold and stainless, as a sword-blade severing night from day.

Captain Lansdale raised his head from the keel of the skiff and blinked towards the east. He was too stiff and numb to move more of his body; even the effort to raise his head seemed to demand a lot of what strength he had left after the interminable night.

The light grew stronger and he saw that the storm had passed. The skiff was rising and falling on a smooth swell beneath a sky slowly turning from grey to pale turquoise.

The primrose in the east changed to rose, tinting the slopes of the swell with mother-of-pearl. The gold became fire and the dazzling sun rose above the horizon. For a while Captain Lansdale lay motionless in the horizontal beams, feeling the warmth flowing through his benumbed body. Gradually strength and feeling returned.

His hands were flayed and bleeding from the rope he had gripped all night, and hurt excessively, but as the sun rose higher and he stretched his cramped limbs in its heat he realized that there was nothing else the matter with him. His eyes smarted and he was intolerably thirsty, but he felt no other ill effects from the strain of the night.

His spirits rose, and after a while he contrived to get to his feet, holding the lashing after the manner of a surf-rider, and stood upright. From the tops of successive seas he surveyed the expanse of heaving ocean in all directions, shading his eyes with his lacerated hand.

There was nothing in sight.

He sat down again. In the shock of the disappointment his weakness returned. His limbs trembled. He was seized by a fit of childish hysterical anger.

"Damn them!" he shouted, and beat his fists on the boat. "Where are they? Why don't they come and find me? Damn them all! Damn them all!"

The futile sound of his voice in the lonely immensity of the sea and sky suddenly shocked him. He mustn't lose control of himself. He must be patient. It was just a question of time . . . Perhaps the skiff was caught in some uncharted current and they were searching in another point of the compass.

Even so, he couldn't have drifted very far. They had only to draw a circle with a radius of, say, ten miles . . . That gave an area of—he occupied himself working out the problem, ignorant of the fact that all night he had been borne by an unknown current at nearly four knots in the exactly opposite direction to that in which the ship had proceeded in search of him.

The hours passed and the sun climbed steadily towards its zenith. The heat beat down on him, reflected brassily from the

surface of the water. To protect his head from sunstroke he made a clumsy turban out of his jacket. His thirst became acute torment, and periodically he rose unsteadily to scan the empty horizon with bloodshot eyes.

Lowering his eyes from one of these fruitless surveys, just as he was about to resume his sitting posture, he saw a blue shadow beneath the surface of the water. It moved slowly, circling the upturned skiff, while Captain Lansdale watched it in horrified fascination. After a while it moved nearer the surface and continued to encircle him.

He could make it out quite plainly, a shark about twelve feet long. So clear was the water that he could see its black eyes watching him, the graceful, effortless undulations of its tail.

The shark presently turned towards the skiff and passed beneath it. For a moment it was invisible to Captain Lansdale, but he was left in no doubt what its intention was. The boat suddenly heeled, very nearly precipitating him into the water. His extemporized turban fell off his head and floated slowly away.

The shark reappeared, accompanied by a second one. Glancing towards his floating coat, Captain Lansdale saw a third shark swimming slowly round it. He hastily resumed a squatting position, and presently the skiff jarred and heeled over again. He clung desperately to the lashing, peering down into the water. He could count five of the brutes slowly patrolling round him.

The sun blazed down with savage heat; the swell gradually subsided and the surface of the sea reflected the sun's rays like polished brass. Captain Lansdale, clinging to the lashing, expecting at any moment to be thrown into the water by a sudden lurch of the skiff, felt as if he were being grilled alive.

It was some time in the afternoon that the bird arrived. Its shadow, passing over the upturned skiff, attracted Captain Lansdale's attention.

He looked up and saw it soaring above him in slow circles, apparently examining him intently. He crouched, watching it, and the bird rose with a few strokes of its pinions and continued to circle lazily overhead.

Several hours elapsed. He lay outstretched along the keel in a semi-conscious state, mechanically clutching the lashing. The sharks had apparently decided that they could not precipitate him into the water, and were swimming quietly backwards and forwards just below the surface. He had forgotten them, forgotten his whereabouts and all hopes of rescue. What consciousness remained in him held bitter thirst, the slow tortures of sunburn and overwhelming fatigue. In this state, on the borderland

of oblivion, he heard the sound of wings, felt a rush of air and simultaneously a searing pain above his temple.

He sat up, blood streaming down his face. The bird had struck at him and soared again. It continued to circle overhead, looking down at him with its green eyes. He had no idea what kind of bird it was. In his light-headedness, he was not even sure it was a bird.

It came nearer, as if meditating another swoop. He wiped the blood from his eyes, and brandished his arms, fighting the hallucinations of sunstroke. The bird uttered a thin cry. It sounded like a note of derisive laughter.

"Go away!" he shouted. "Go away! This is your fault. You drove me here!" His voice rose almost to a scream. This was no bird hovering over him. It had long fingers tipped with crimson, hooked to strike at him again.

"Leave me alone!" he bawled.

The sun declined towards the horizon, diffusing sea and sky in a blazing effulgence of light. The sharks passed to and fro beneath the upturned skiff. The bird circled watchfully above it, biding its time. Presently it was joined by others, concentrating from outer space upon the floating speck that was Captain Lansdale, gesticulating with his fists and babbling about a book.

The look-out, perched precariously on a boatswain's stool at the foretopmasthead, lowered his glasses, and looked down at the ship to rest his eyes.

They had been looking for the Captain since dawn, but as the hours passed and there was no sign of the skiff, the gloom on the messdeck deepened, and by tea-time the word went round that likely as not she had sunk and the Captain eaten by sharks.

They liked the Captain. He was fair to everybody, and you knew where you were with him, even at the defaulters' table, where you got all there was coming to you. A bit hard, but straight.

The look-out could see the Commander and navigator on the compass platform below. They were leaning over the chart-table, and the officer of the watch stood by the binnacle with his glasses raised to his eyes. Presently the sun would set and it would be dark. Then what would they do?

There was a buzz forward that the Commander and the navigator had had words on the bridge. It was about currents which the navigator said weren't in the book nor marked on the chart, so how was he to know? The Commander said it was his blasted job to know, and there they'd been all day searching to the sou'-west when for all they knew the skiff was drifting

nor'-east. So to and fro they went, and now they were heading into the sunset. How could anybody see anything in that flaming light?

The look-out shifted his position a little and resumed his scrutiny of the horizon. Far above him and a little ahead of the ship a large bird was flying swiftly towards the sunset. He wondered where it was making for and presently got it in the focus of his glasses. A whacking great bird with a kind of hook at the end of its beak. Maybe it was an eagle, or an albatross. The look-out was not much of an ornithologist. But through the glasses he presently saw some more.

They were all flying into the aching glare of the sunset. There must be something . . . He crinkled up his eyes, trying to see. Five minutes passed; he had lost sight of the birds. Then he saw a speck in the dazzle and lost it again.

He rubbed his eyes with his finger and tried once more. Must have been his imagination.

There it was! Seaweed? A bird? No. It was some object or other. A little black speck. He bent down, cupping his hand round his mouth, and bawled with all the strength of his lungs: "Object fine on the port bow, sir!"

It was the shout the whole ship had been waiting for all day. He saw all the glasses on the bridge directed towards the sunset. They wouldn't see anything for a minute. The men on the forecastle rushed to the port rails; men came scrambling up the hatchways in every variety of dress and undress. A ragged sound of cheering floated up to him, died away, and was presently renewed in a great roar of voices . . .

Captain Lansdale lay in his bunk listening to the faint tinkle of the wardroom piano. It was evening and he supposed they were having a singsong after dinner. It was the fifth day since his rescue, and although he still felt weak and disinclined for mental effort, he thought he would persuade the doctor to take him off the sick list in the morning.

He would have to report the occurrence to the Commander-in-Chief without, of course, imputing any blame to anyone. His private opinion was that the navigator was largely responsible for the delay in finding him; although it was undeniable that there were currents in those waters whose strength and direction were a completely unknown quantity. However, when he was off the sick list he would investigate the matter.

It was possible, of course, that he himself had been to blame to some extent. He had held on down-wind too long. A minor aspect of the matter. He was perfectly free to go away in one of

his own ship's boats for a sail on a make-and-mend afternoon . . . His head began to ache again, but his thoughts revolved relentlessly round the circle of cause and effect. He was a free agent; why had he chosen to go away sailing on that particular afternoon? He might as well face the facts squarely. He had gone out of the ship because he had been driven out of it. Driven out of it by thoughts he was trying to escape from; thoughts occasioned by a book he was reading.

The sound of young men's voices singing drifted through the wardroom scuttles and reached him where he lay plucking at the sheet.

Now first there came the Captain's wife,
And she was dressed in blue,
And in one corner of her hat
She carried the galley's crew.

It was years since he had sung that meaningless old chanty with its endless verses; not since he was a midshipman in a gunroom. He had even forgotten how it went on, and strained his ears, listening.

For she was one of the fair ones,
One of the rollicking crew.

His hand moved slightly, as though beating time to the rhythm of the song. The voices died away as the verse ended, and swelled again.

And then came the Commander's wife,
And she was dressed in check . . .

Check. That would suit her slender figure, and her queer, resentful eyes . . . Captain Lansdale had ceased beating time with his hand. His fingers strayed to the scarcely healed scar above his brow.

There was a knock at the door and the Commander entered. His friendly, guileless smile held a faint solicitude. "I came to see how you were this evening, sir. I hope the singing isn't disturbing you."

"Not a bit," replied Captain Lansdale. "I hardly noticed it, as a matter of fact. I am glad you came in. I had just remembered that I still have a book you lent me. It is in my day cabin. Will you take it when you go?"

Keeling passed through the curtained doorway into the day cabin and returned with the book. He had opened it at the fly-leaf and stood looking at it with a smile.

"I sometimes pull my wife's leg about her name," he said. "Tansy."

"The name of a herb, isn't it?" asked Captain Lansdale, staring at the rivets in the plating overhead.

"Yes. A gardening book at home says: 'Is sometimes used as a bitter medicine.'" He chuckled at this humorous aspect of his wife's name. "She sent me this for my birthday."

"Did she?"

Keeling thought his Captain sounded fatigued, and prepared to take his departure. "That scar is healing nicely, sir."

"Yes," concurred Captain Lansdale.

Again his fingers strayed over the wound. Keeling wished him good night and left the cabin, closing the door softly behind him.

When he was alone Captain Lansdale reached for a shaving-mirror beside his bunk and examined the scar. As the Commander had said, it was healing nicely. The shape of it was like an exclamation mark.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTION to CURTAIN UP on page 16

1. *a. New York* *b. Naples* *c. Milan*
2. *i. The Rake's Progress; ii. Fall River Legend; iii. Pineapple Poll; iv. Façade*
3. *The Baths of Caracalla, on the outskirts of Rome, where operas are performed during the summer*
4. *a Stravinsky* *b. Prokofiev*
   c. Chopin *d. Tchaikovsky*
5. *Falstaff, Macbeth, Otello; Lear and Hamlet were projected, but not completed.*
6. *i. Wagner; ii. Beethoven; iii. Purcell; iv. Weber; v. Rossini*
7. *a. enchaînement is a sequence of steps*
   b. tutu is a ballet skirt
   c. fouetté is a turn on one leg with other leg doing an outward whipping movement
   d. tour en l'air is a complete turn in mid air
   e. terre à terre is the term for dancing on ground level
8. *i. Australian* *ii. Italian*
   iii. Norwegian *iv. Swedish*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Amplification.* 10, *Abjured.* 11, *Certain.* 12, *Aura.* 13, *Elbow.* 14, *Pisa.* 17, *Drawled.* 18, *Satanic.* 19, *Elastic.* 22, *Andover.* 24, *Sire.* 25, *Clare.* 26, *Slot.* 29, *Naïveté.* 30, *Lumbago.* 31, *German castles.*

Down. 2, *Majorca.* 3, *Lark.* 4, *Fiddled.* 5, *Cocoons.* 6, *Tare.* 7, *Oration.* 8, *Salad-dressing.* 9, *Incarceration.* 15, *Sloth.* 16, *Study.* 20, *Airline.* 21, *Colleen.* 22, *Aurelia.* 23, *Village.* 27, *Perm.* 28, *Omit.*

SAINTS ON THE SIDEWALK

The dwarf danced excitedly
rattling his cup and pointing

BY MORRIS L. WEST

A MAN was dying in the back room of a Naples slum. There were knife wounds in his chest and in his back. His life was bubbling away in the small, bloody foam that formed at the corners of his mouth.

A grey-faced friar, in the dusty habit of St. Francis, bent over him, holding his hand, whispering into his ear the words of repentance, waiting for some sign that would justify the pronouncing of the words of forgiveness.

Back in the shadows stood two other men: Lieutenant Giorgio Carrese of the Guardia di Finanza, and Mike Romano, Treasury agent from Brooklyn.

They, too, were waiting for a sign.

Suddenly, the dying man heaved himself upward on the bed. His eyes stared wildly, his mouth twitched, and he spoke four gasping words, " Sono . . . santi . . . sulla strada . . ." Then his throat filled up with blood and he died.

The friar made the sign of the cross and pronounced the formula of absolution, then he took a book from his breast pocket and a small phial of oil and began to administer the last rites. Carlo Malinconico, gangster and drug runner, was legally dead, but his Church gave him the benefit of the doubt and offered him the last mercies, long after the legal presumption that he was beyond them.

The two officials stood awkwardly with bowed heads until the little ceremony was over. The friar put away his book and his phial, took off his stole, and folded it carefully. His old eyes were sombre. Lieutenant Carrese questioned him: " He said, ' There are saints on the street.' What did it mean, padre? "

The friar shrugged unhappily. " Who knows except God? Sometimes it happens that evil men are granted at the end a vision of goodness and the grace of repentance."

" Do you believe that, padre? "

" I hope it," said the friar flatly. He looked down at the dead man, then turned towards the door. " He belongs to you now, gentlemen. I have done as much as I can for him."

He pulled the cowl of his habit up over his head and walked to the door. Carrese and Romano looked at each other.

" Well," said Mike Romano, " what do you think? "

" I need a cigarette," said Giorgio Carrese.

The Treasury man broke open a fresh packet. They lit up and smoked a few moments in silence. Then Carrese spoke again, " A man like this dies the way he has lived. He had made a deal with us, remember? He would give us information on the export routes for heroin, in return for immunity and protection. He was doing it for vengeance—because someone stole his girl."

" So . . . ? " Romano blew smoke rings in the musty air.

" So," said Carrese quietly, " his last thought is not of God or repentance but of vengeance. His last words, too."

" There are saints on the street."

" Or, rather, there are saints on the sidewalk." Giorgio Carrese was a polyglot and proud of his subtle understanding of American.

Romano shrugged. He had come a long way in the hope that this operation with the Guardia di Finanza would seal finally the outlet through which processed heroin was shipped to the United States. Ten minutes with Carlo Malinconico would have given him all he needed. But Carlo Malinconico was dead, and his only legacy was a meaningless Italian tag. Which didn't help at all.

" It might help," said Carrese, soberly, " if only we could relate it to his dying thought."

" If . . . if . . . if! " Romano was unhappy. He was in no mood for airy speculation. " Look, Malinconico's dead. He was killed to stop his mouth. Next step, it seems to me, is to find the guy that killed him."

" No, my friend. No. We do better if we follow the line we have been given. We look for the saints on the sidewalk."

" For Pete's sake—! " Romano was an Italian, too, and his temper was volatile and uncertain. Just in time he remembered that he was a long way from home, that he depended on Carrese for all the assistance he was likely to get in Italy—and Naples, which is not Italy at all. He forced a grin, and said resignedly, " O.K., Giorgio, it's your case. Where do we start? "

" We find ourselves a bar and drink coffee," said Giorgio Carrese.

They left Carlo Malinconico in the care of a scrubby detachment of police and clattered down the worn stone steps that led

into a narrow alley. The sky was blotted out by lines of washing and they stumbled over piles of refuse and sprawling children as they made their way towards the top end of the via Roma.

They found a table in a bright little bar and drank three cups of bitter coffee and a glass of strega without coming a step closer to the truth. Mike Romano's patience was fraying at the edges, but the young Guardia official seemed to be enjoying himself. He was like a student puzzling over a classic problem.

" We start with the assumption that the last thought of the man was the same as his first—vengeance. He tries to give us the information for which we came."

" Sure, sure! And he tells us there are saints on the sidewalk. So what? "

" We think about that a moment. We take the general proposition that there are good and saintly people on the sidewalks of every city—even of Naples, where the percentage of good people is probably quite low." Carrese grinned disarmingly. " I agree that this is too vague for our purposes. So we think further. We remember that one of the most common sights in Naples is the little brown friar or the black sister who goes about shaking a tin and begging money for the orphanage or the Church or the home for old people. It is a good disguise and a safe role for a criminal contact."

Mike Romano sat up and began to be interested. Carrese wasn't the bland fool he sometimes looked. His point was clear enough : an investigator in Naples had to think like the Neapolitans—a tortuous process, almost impossible for the outsider. He questioned Carrese: " It's a feasible proposition, but how do you work from there? From what I've seen, there are hundreds of these people on the streets. If you start pulling 'em in for questioning, aren't you liable to have trouble with the Church authorities? "

Carrese nodded. " I have thought of that. It is a matter for consultation with my chief who will then take the matter up with the Cardinal. After that we have lists and identifications prepared by the monasteries and convents. It is not so difficult as it sounds."

Mike Romano was impressed. It was at least a beginning. It provided a feasible hypothesis based on the Neapolitan aptitude for theatre. He was less happy when he thought how it would look in his next report to the chief. But he kept his doubts to himself and asked Carrese, " Anything I can do in the meantime? "

Carrese grinned, pushed back his chair, and stood up.

" Nothing at all, my friend. Leave it to me for a few days.

Find yourself a nice girl and take her out to Capri for the sun."

"I'm a married man," said Romano sourly.

"In Naples?" Carrese chuckled happily. "In Naples it doesn't apply. Arrivederci, amico. Enjoy yourself."

They parted then. Carrese went back to Headquarters to begin his devious negotiations with Church and State, while Mike Romano strolled down the noisy swarming thoroughfare of the via Roma.

It was hot, dusty, and shabby, but full of vivid life. Women chattered and gesticulated at the food stalls, vendors of novelties cried their wares and danced their little toys, street singers whined and klaxons hooted and the shoeblacks beat on their boxes, calling for trade. Grubby urchins tugged at his coat tails, begging for dollars or cigarettes, and bright fish winked at him from glass bowls strung along a narrow shop front. Dust rose in little clouds about his feet and the sweat began to seep out of his skin. He stopped a moment to take off his jacket.

A grimy hand thrust a tin cup under his nose and a rasping voice chanted in his ear, "A gift for the saints, signore. Of your charity, a gift!"

Startled, he looked down to see a grinning dwarf and, beyond him, a pavement artist busy with his chalks on a picture that spread over yards of pavement.

The dwarf danced excitedly and rattled his cup and pointed at the picture. "Bellissima, non è vero, signore? Beautiful, isn't it? A great artist. Yet he must do this to eat. Look, signore . . . the saints! All the saints of Naples—San Gaetano, Santa Lucia, San Gennaro, Sant' Agata. A small gift, of your charity!"

Romano fumbled in his pocket for a handful of change and thrust it into his cup. The dwarf gasped at the generosity of the gift, then caught at his hand, and began dragging him along for a closer inspection of the art work. Romano jerked away in disgust and turned off down the via Roma.

A moment later he stopped dead in his tracks. *Saints on the sidewalk!*

There they were, staring at him, gaudy and improbable—Saint Sebastian with the arrows in his chest, Saint Gennaro carrying the bottle of his own blood, Saint Lucy ecstatic in her virgin martyrdom, Saint Gaetano, the friend of the poor, with his sack of alms on his back. *Saints on the sidewalk.*

But what did they mean? What was their connection with a dead man, and with the Mediterranean drug cartel?

The artist looked up and grinned at him. The dwarf sidled up in the hope of another gift from the crazy fellow in the American

clothes. Romano stared down at the bright chalks and tried to read their meaning. It was impossible and he knew it. This was a job for Carrese. He turned away and walked swiftly down the via Roma.

A hundred yards down the thoroughfare, out of sight of the dwarf and the great artist, he turned into a bar, bought a disk for the telephone from the attendant, and dialled the number of Carrese's office. He fumed impatiently at the delaying routines of Italian switchboards, but finally Carrese came on. His voice was crackling and distant. "What's the trouble, Mike?"

"No trouble." Romano's mouth was pressed against the phone and he spoke swiftly and cautiously. "I've found the saints."

"What?"

"I've found the saints. I can't say any more now. I'm in a bar. How soon can you get here to meet me?"

"Where are you?"

Romano looked up, cautiously, reading the reversed letters on the glass pane. "Fauno Bar . . . up from the Museum on the right-hand side. I'll have a beer and wait for you."

"Give me five minutes. I'll be there."

The line went dead and Romano turned back to the counter to spend the longest five minutes of his life over a glass of tepid beer. When Carrese arrived, sweating and excited, they walked outside and stood talking like any pair of Neapolitans in the drowsy noonday sun.

"I don't know what it means," said Romano finally, "but the saints are there on the sidewalk; and I like it better than your idea of checking on all the begging monks in Naples."

"So do I," said Giorgio Carrese, rubbing his dark chin. "So do I."

"Any ideas?"

"Not yet. None that I would wish to talk about. I'd like to see the pictures first."

They made their plans. Romano would walk back up the via Roma on the opposite side of the road. Carrese would stroll past the artist and his tout and pay tribute as Romano had done. They would meet in the little park outside the hospital at the top of the street.

Then they parted and Romano waited ten minutes for a break in the traffic before he could cross the via Roma. He walked swiftly up the hill and when he came abreast of the artist's pitch he looked across. Carrese was there, staring down at the pictures, while the dwarf stood by, rattling his little tin and demanding alms. Romano walked on.

When he came to the little park he sat down on a stone bench, lit a cigarette, and waited for Carrese. He waited ten minutes, twenty, forty—and at the end of an hour his patience gave out. He ground out his last cigarette and walked angrily down the road. There was no sign of Carrese. The dwarf and the artist had gone, too, and a couple of urchins were scrawling dirty words over the suffering faces of the saints.

Romano went back to his hotel. He telephoned Carrese and was told the Tenente was out. He cursed proficiently and left a message. Then he ordered drinks sent to his room and sat down to wait again.

At seven in the evening there was a knock at his door, and Giorgio Carrese came in. Romano opened his mouth to shout a protest, then closed it again. Carrese's appearance shocked him. The man was grey with fatigue; his eyes were bloodshot, his clothes were crumpled, and his twitching fingers were stained with nicotine.

"For Pete's sake, man! What's happened to you?"

Carrese gave him a tired grin. "Your saints were the right ones, Mike. They told me all we want to know. The only difficulty is to prove it. For that I need you."

"But how? What was the meaning of—?"

Carrese cut him short with an impatient gesture. "How and why, I shall explain later. First I want you to look at this."

He walked over to the divan and spread out a small map of the city of Naples. There were twelve points each marked in red ink with a cross and a circle. Six were in the best quarters of the city, and six in grim slum areas.

"What do they mean?" Romano looked up at the drawn, stubbly face of his colleague.

"According to your saints, each one of these crosses represents the apartment of a receiver and exporter of narcotics. Those in the better quarters are Americans who have been staying in Naples on visitors' permits. The other six are emigrants booked to depart for the United States. All are registered on the passenger list of the *Lucania* which sails from Naples in forty-eight hours."

Romano gave a low whistle of surprise. "How did you find out all that?"

Carrese shrugged wearily. "The saints told me part of it. The rest I had to get for myself. I have been racing from point to point and making telephone calls all afternoon. That is why I am so late and why I have not contacted you before."

"What's the next move? Arrest?"

Carrese spread his hands in a gesture of despair. "If it were

my move, yes. Unfortunately, it is not. The Director refuses to authorize any proceedings until I have proof. I cannot get proof unless I commit an illegal act involving American citizens . . . for which, of course, the Director will take no responsibility. I am being thrown to the lions. I—I am asking you to step into the arena with me."

" What do you want me to do? "

Carrese pointed to one of the small inked crosses on the map.

" This is the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Andreasen, American citizens. I want to enter it and search their baggage."

" Why not start with the Italians who are under your own jurisdiction? "

" Because," said Carrese simply, " once I do that, the game is finished. Rumour runs like wildfire in the crowded streets of the city. We should catch one fish and all the rest would swim out through holes in the net."

Mike Romano chewed on the proposition. The taste of it did not please him. If Carrese's guess were wrong, both of them would be mauled by the lions and their careers would be finished. The Treasury might forget a failure, they would never forgive a political scandal.

" Well, Mike? " Carrese looked at him with anxious eyes.

" Let's go," said Romano crisply.

" Tu sei un proprio amico," said Carrese, softly. " You're a real friend."

Ten minutes later they were walking up the staircase of a fashionable block of flats on the via Santa Lucia. On the second landing Carrese stopped, and pointed to a door. The card under the bell-push said, *Mr. & Mrs. Charles Andreasen.*

" This is the place."

Romano pressed the bell. They heard murmurs and muffled movements, and then the door was opened by a tall, fair-haired fellow with a crew cut and puzzled, hostile eyes. " Something you wanted? " He spoke in a flat mid-western drawl.

" Mr. Charles Andreasen? " It was Romano who spoke.

" That's right."

" I'd like to talk to you."

" About what? "

Andreasen's big frame blocked the doorway. He had his rights and his rights forbade entry and search without warrant. So far as he was concerned, all the talking would be done outside the apartment.

Romano's fist drove into his middle and as he sagged forward, Romano's shoulder caught him in the mouth. He lurched back.

The two agents thrust after him into the apartment. Carrese kicked the door shut behind him.

Then Andreasen came up swinging. Romano feinted and slammed him backward into the crowded lounge, and when he stood rocking against the table, Carrese faced him with a small black Brietta.

" For heaven's sake! What's going on? "

It was a woman's voice, high and strained, and Romano turned to see her standing in the doorway that led to the bedroom, a small, dark, compact girl with her long hair tied back in a horse-tail and her high-breasted figure swathed in a black négligé.

" She doesn't scream, you notice," said Carrese in swift Italian. " She makes a dramatic surprise, but she keeps her voice down."

" I've noticed," said Romano in the same tongue. Then, in English, " Over here, sweetheart, and join your husband."

As the girl moved cautiously across the room to join him, Andreasen found his voice again. He spoke thickly through bruised and broken lips. " I don't know who you are or what you want, but you'll—"

" Where is it? " asked Mike Romano, gently.

" Where's what? "

" The consignment."

Andreasen's eyes were blank, his muscles steady. But the girl gave a start of surprise and looked swiftly at her husband.

" I don't know who you are or what you're talking about. If you're looking for something, go and find it. But be careful of my equipment. It's my living."

Then Romano saw that the lounge and the bedroom were littered with clothes and shoes and open suitcases—the normal disarray of tourists making ready to pull out. He saw two cameras—expensive professional models—a tripod, a carrying-case, and in the centre of the table a small stack of materials for developing and printing.

Andreasen's eyes followed him. " Go on, for Pete's sake! Look for whatever it is you expect to find—then get out! "

" So you're a photographer? "

" That's right."

" What paper? "

" Freelance. I work for the syndicates. Who the hell are you? "

" Treasury agent," said Romano blandly. " I work against the syndicates."

He picked up a large bottle of white crystalline powder labelled, *Fine-grain Developer, Formula one.* It was new and unopened,

but when his fingers pressed against the seal, the wax was soft and tacky. He grinned and looked up at Andreasen. " Where did you buy this? "

" In the States. It's the last of my stock. You can't get the good stuff here. I had to bring my own. I declared it coming out. I'll declare it going in."

" Careful fellow," said Romano, smoothly. " But not careful enough. The makers use plastic seals. This is sealing-wax. Your developer is processed heroin."

Then the girl screamed and Andreasen leapt. Carrese's shot caught him in the shoulder and sent him spinning back against the wall. Carrese handed the gun to Mike Romano and reached for the telephone. After a pause he said briskly, " This is Lieutenant Carrese. Give me the Director—subito! ".

Later, at three in the morning, they sat in a waterside restaurant with wine in front of them and music in their ears, and Carrese gave him the answer to the riddle of the saints on the sidewalk.

" When first I saw the saints, Mike, I knew that you were right. Like you, I was at a loss to understand their meaning. Then I saw something strange. There are a hundred pavement artists in Naples, but they all have one thing in common. They like bravura—the big style—the crowded picture with lots of cherubs and saints to frame the principal subject. This one was different. He had cut up his picture into careful little squares and filled each one with a separate subject—a frame for each saint. It was unusual, out of character, as you say. I asked myself why. I counted the frames—four across, three down. Twelve in all. That gave each picture a number.

" It was still not enough. I looked again at the pictures. All the saints were clearly shown, each with his own symbol. But as I watched, the artist began to do more—under each one he began to write the name of the subject, Santa Lucia, San Gennaro . . . This again was out of character, since it is part of the device of these fellows to make you curious. You ask what the picture represents. The answer costs you money. You see? "

Romano nodded. He saw very well. He saw something else, too, a shrewd and subtle young investigator working with his own brain, unaided by filing-systems and teleprinters and all the mechanics of modern criminology.

Carrese went on, " The next step was the hardest of all. I had twelve names and twelve numbers. Santa Lucia was number one. San Gaetano was number twelve, the last of all."

" And so? "

"And so, my friend," said Giorgio Carrese, "I stood like a fool until a tourist stopped me and asked me how to get to Santa Lucia. Then I remembered that many of our streets have saints' names—so that the saints on the sidewalk were street names and the numbers were the numbers of apartments. I checked the list of residents in each apartment and found the common factors—American tourists and Italian emigrants. When our first guess was proved right . . . from there it was easy. I telephoned Headquarters for a search of each apartment. Tomorrow we pick up the artist and his dwarf—if their own people have not dealt with them already. Result to date—ten arrests and thirty kilos of uncut heroin."

"Nice work," said Mike Romano. He raised his glass and gave the toast in the tongue which had once been his own. "Al genio d'Italia—to the Italian genius."

"Ai nostri alleati americani," said Giorgio Carrese. "To our American allies."

They drank—deeply.

ARGOSY COMPETITION

The Romans seem to have been opposed to luggage, and no wonder, since they did such a lot of walking; Juvenal said, "The traveller with empty pockets will sing even in the robber's face," and Seneca, even more pessimistically, "No man can swim ashore and carry his baggage with him." Air-travel has again reduced us to a low luggage-quota, so we invite readers to send a four-line verse naming the one article they consider indispensable for a journey.

Entries in block letters on a postcard, please, to: The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London E.C.4, by July 10.

Two guineas goes to the wittiest.

April Results—We were deluged with entries offering solutions for Horatio's versical problem of the lovers and the light-years, but so many competitors hit on the same two notions—deep-freeze for the unhappy couple, or an up-to-date version of the young lady called Bright—that it was difficult to adjudicate.

Our first prize of two guineas is divided between Christopher McDermott, of East Dulwich, whose hero arrived in a juvenile condition, and Geoffrey S. Hill, of Berkhamsted—"It's married we'll be by yesterday night!". Second prize of half a guinea to Marius Lodeesen, who was the only competitor to suggest astral travel—"More rapid than rockets, The urges that press our souls out of their sockets."

Stuart Cloete

After fifteen years' ranching, Stuart Cloete left his South African home, went to London, and started writing. His first novel, The Turning Wheels, became a best-seller overnight. He followed it with a string of successes, mostly set in South Africa where his family have lived since in 1562 an ancestor was the first man to obtain a grant of land.

MAMBA

In Mamba he shifts his scene to the forests of Central Africa, torrid, full of secrets, and surrounded by mystery, where danger is part of life. The characters of this triangle drama, imprisoned together by a wall of jungle, can find no escape from their savage problem.

★ **Written out of his intimate knowledge of the Dark Continent——**

Mamba is Cloete's most powerful work.

ARGOSY is proud to present it ➤

HENRY SEAMAN said, " What will you have, Colley? Whisky, gin, beer, Cinzano, Dubonnet? We've got the works, haven't we, Jim? "

" Yes," I said. " The works." And we had too. Drinking had become a kind of hobby with us. Though I did not like it much, it was something to do.

" Tonic and lime juice," Colley said. " The usual . . ."

" Can't tempt you, can I? " Henry said. That was another thing we had a lot of. Temptation. Temptation and boredom. Maybe they went together. Sometimes I wondered which came first, like the chicken or the egg. Henry had got Colley tight once. It had been very dark on the stoep and he'd given him a whisky—sometimes he did take a very weak one—but this had angostura bitters in it that disguised its strength. Colley hadn't known the trick. This was typical of Henry. He never knew when to stop.

I was against fooling about with Colley. It was like being unkind to a child. He was a good man. One of the few I've ever met. A missionary, and as a rule I don't like missionaries. Mealy-mouthed, psalm-singing lot, who put Mother Hubbards on the Africans, teach them hymns, and then talk about their converts. But Colley—the Reverend John Franklin Collison—wasn't like that. He practised what he preached—which made him a difficult neighbour sometimes.

I looked at him sitting there in his old khaki. A skinny little man with a head too big for him. It was shaped like a gourd, big on the top and tapering down to a thin yellow face covered with

MAMBA

BY STUART CLOETE

small knobs that made it hard for him to shave properly. A dried-up little man who looked very queer sitting beside Henry, who was so fat. Fatter now than he had ever been.

Henry Seaman—Fatty as we had called him at school—was a gross pink-and-white man with very fine, very fair, almost white hair. He looked like a big, powerful baby. At school he had been a bully but few people had known it. Only the few he bullied in secret, and they were afraid to tell. He was so nice to them in public that no one would have believed them if they had talked about it.

In those days he had been not so much fat as curvacious, rotund and rather angelic-looking. Fenshaw,' the art master, told his colleagues that they could have stuck little wings on Henry, and shoved him up on to the ceiling with a bow in his hand and a little quiver on his back. A cupid, and a nasty one at that, was Fenshaw's opinion. But in the Common Room no one thought much of his opinion. Most people thought Henry very funny. He had a quick wit and a passion for practical jokes.

He regarded himself as a good fellow. A life-of-the-party boy who had quite a way with the ladies. He acquired that other fatman's talent: he became a remarkable dancer. He floated round the floor like a great chunk of thistledown spinning in the breeze. Charm oozed out of him like sweat, and with his sweat. But the beads of perspiration on his pink brow were in no way offensive.

They looked as if they belonged there, like dew on some big pink-and-golden flower.

Everyone was fond of old Seaman, of Fat Boy, or Pinky Seaman. He drank pink gins in those days. Everyone liked him except some of the people he had played his jokes on.

One of his favourite and funniest tricks was to drop a white mouse down the front of a girl's dress. Oh, that was very funny, especially if she became hysterical. He bought the mice for this purpose and carried them about in a little carton with string handles. He'd hold one up, white and struggling, making little swimming motions with its tiny pink feet as he held it by the tail, and then, neat as a whistle, down it would go between some girl's breasts. The mouse nearly always got killed, crushed on the floor under someone's foot or struck down by the barman's broom.

No one ever knocked him down. A lot of men wanted to but he looked very big standing there balanced on the balls of his feet, rocking lightly back and forth, his hands half open, hanging loosely at his side, his friendly, bright blue eyes challenging anyone who had no sense of humour. A quirk, that's what it was. Old Fatty was all right really. O.K. No harm in him, but a bit of a bore when he'd had one or two and started being funny.

I had forgotten most of this when I met him again years after at The Old Metropole in Johannesburg. But it came back by degrees. I had been out of a job then and he'd offered me one. So perhaps I had not wanted to remember.

He was the last man in the world whom I would ever have thought of as a farmer. But he was, and a good one. His father had farmed in a big way in Yorkshire. After the war, Fatty Seaman had refused to go back and had lived on his gratuity and his wits till the money was done and he'd let his wits run away with him. He'd been just a bit too clever a couple of times and decided that Africa was the place to go. England had temporarily become too hot to hold him. I still didn't like him but had learnt to live with him.

We sipped our drinks. They were warm. We had no ice in those days. We lit cigarettes and threw them away. They drew badly. Henry lit a new one.

Nobody said anything. There was nothing much to say. We'd said everything we had to say months ago. I wondered sometimes why we met as we did. And then decided that there was some kind of attraction, a current that drew white men together in Africa like twigs in a whirlpool. That was what we were—white twigs in a black flood. We had nothing in common but our whiteness and the vestigial memories of our homes, our youth, our mothers, at whose knees we'd learnt to pray and not to do the things we did now.

We figured that we were the salt of the earth. Kings in a way. Masters who shouted, " Boy! " and boys came. We killed things. Wild animals. And ate them. We called it sport but we had to kill them if we wanted to eat meat. We took our lives in our hands

and pretended we liked it. Maybe we did like it. Danger is good when it's over. Like pain, you don't remember it. And when it was over we felt good.

For man and beast danger is part of life in Africa. There is not a buck or zebra that does not have to run for its life at least once each day. All the time those great liquid eyes are searching for enemies, those great flickering ears listening, those moist black nostrils snuffing. The margin of safety is so slight . . .

At the usual time a boy brought out a hissing pressure lamp.

" Take that bloody thing away," Henry shouted. " My God, do you want every bloody insect in the Congo on the stoep? "

The boy took the lamp away.

Colley said, " I want to talk to you about something."

" Talk away," Henry said. It was not one of his good days.

" One of my girls has been raped," Colley said.

" Well, I didn't do it," Henry said.

" One of your boys may have, though."

" Which one? " Henry asked.

" She won't say."

" Well, what do you want me to do? And how do you know it's one of mine? "

" I don't know. But it's not a mission boy," Colley said, " and I don't think it's anyone from the village."

" That's what she says," Henry said. " Rape," he said. " If he'd paid her it wouldn't have been rape."

" It's worse than that," Colley said. " She's got marks on her."

" What sort of marks? "

" Scratches. Deep ones. She thinks he was going to kill her."

Henry threw his cigarette away. " What are you trying to say? "

" I've seen them before," Colley said.

" Seen what? "

" Those marks. When I was in West Africa."

" Well? "

" She told me where it happened. I went there. There was some spoor on the ground."

" Of course there was spoor . . ."

" But it wasn't all man's spoor. There was a leopard's with it. Tomorrow I'm going to the Chef de District."

" I still don't see . . ." Henry said.

" Leopard-men," Colley said. " *Aniotos*. I've been afraid of it for some time. Now I'm sure."

" My God," Henry said, " I thought that was all over."

" Nothing is ever over in Africa," Colley said. He was silent for a moment, and then he burst out, " How I hate the forest. Any evil can live in its darkness."

" But there are leopards about," Henry said. " A couple of people have been killed in the last year or so."

" Yes," Colley said. " Women, and no body found till it was rotten, putrid, hardly identifiable. Why weren't they found? Or were they found and not reported? I can feel it," he said. " In

the village. In the mission. There is fear," he said. " There is silence. Even the tomtoms sound different." He looked up. " Have you lost many calves lately?"

" No," Henry said, " not for six months, and I trapped that one."

" Curious, isn't it," Colley said, " if there are leopards about? No calves, no dogs in the village. No goats. Only women. Do you remember when they were killed, Henry? "

" Not exactly. A year or so ago."

" Yes," Colley said. " Before the rains."

" What is all this leopard-man business? " I asked. I had heard of it but that was about all.

" It's a secret society. They kill for various motives but the strongest is for medicine. The witch-doctors want parts of the human body. The genitals, the skin of the face, the heart, the lungs. The leopard-men get them. They dress up in leopardskins. They use wooden pads on their feet to imitate the spoor. They kill with iron hooks that make scratches resembling those made by a leopard's claws. But there's a difference. When a leopard strikes, at the end of the stroke its claws contract and the scratches get narrower. When they are made by a leopard-man they don't. Hers didn't," he said.

" How did she get away? " I asked.

" Something frightened him," he said, " and she was greased."

We didn't say anything. Colley sat with his elbows on the table, his hand over his eyes. I knew what was biting him. One of his girls going, half naked, and greased, to meet her lover in the forest.

It was quite dark now. The night falls suddenly here, like a black cloak punctured by the bullet-holes of the stars. The savage brilliance of the day is smothered by the more terrible blackness of the night in which death walks. Of course, it does not look like that. It looks beautiful, indigo, star-spangled, the great Milky Way reversed, spread like tinsel. The silhouettes of the tall trees and palms are as romantic as anyone could wish. From the distance comes the throb of the tomtoms, the never-ending pulse of the African night. Fireflies flit and hover. Later the moon would rise blood-red, illuminating the edge of the forest like a flame. This was the moon of sacrifice; of madness that raced men's blood, like tides, into a fury of desire, of nostalgia, of love, of memory. It worked like strong drink. Whatever a man felt was intensified by its pale light.

It even affected me, with my blood thinned by fever, my ears ringing with the bells of quinine. It struck some atavistic chord. For hundreds of thousands of years our ancestors had danced by the moon's blue light, as the Africans danced today. In the light of the moon the savage and the civilized man meet on common ground.

Everywhere round us people were waiting in the darkness for the moon, the sister of the sun, to rise. The silence was profound. The sound of the drums did nothing to disturb the massive stillness of the dark. They only made it more apparent, as the clothes of a

woman may emphasize the beauty of her nakedness. We were surrounded by mystery, by the inexplicable, in which we white men were irrelevant, separated from such reality by the steel and concrete of our culture. Understanding nothing, we hovered on the periphery of the unchanging forest and hated everything, striving to overcome our fears with our alcoholic contempt.

This was not a new mood, but Colley's story had pointed it up. His presence had. Here was a man of God facing the terrible gods of field and forest and river. Setting up his Cross against the fetishes. Pitting his two-thousand-year-old crucified Christ against the bloody sacrifice that was still warm. His tin tabernacle against the great ju-ju trees, the silk cottons, big-buttressed, rooted in the fecundity of Africa.

I do not know what the others felt. Colley, I was sure, was thinking along my lines, but he had his faith to sustain him. I had no faith, only the knowledge that such faith existed. I should like to have had it. It was impossible not to believe in God here. But much harder to think of Him as merciful. I had seen so little of mercy in Africa. Only cruelty and savagery, against which, as a defence, one developed one's own savagery—a core of hardness that had to be worn like a breastplate. But how heavy it was. How hard to live for days alone, with only guns and the contents of the medicine chest to defend one's physical life, with only alcohol to support the spirit.

Henry got up. I heard the syphon squirting. He was having another drink. That was one of the answers. Have another drink. And another. Courage and hope came out of a bottle. So did despair.

Behind us, behind the living-room on the back baraza, Marie-Thérèse would be moving around on her bare feet. If anyone was about she kept out of the way. Big-eyed as a buck, almost as invisible when she wanted to be, she was part of the background of the ranch. Smooth, sleek as a leech, she cast her dark aura over the establishment. I heard the gramophone playing softly and knew she was squatting over it. Her silk-wrapped head slightly cocked over the revolving disk, a stable lantern on the floor beside her.

But who was I to judge? Henry had been here much longer than I. Perhaps she was part of the price that he had had to pay for his knowledge of Africa and the African. The price of knowledge might be such intimacies. Once I would have been shocked. Then surprised. Now I felt nothing except perhaps an occasional twinge of jealousy. Men did not cease to be men because they went into the wilds. And women remained women. These women were all women. There were no other aspects. They knew what men wanted and had known from their naked childhood. A man only wanted one thing. I thought of the white women who said that, women who knew nothing. These women knew nothing in words, they only knew the invitation of their bold dark eyes, of their satin skins and writhing hips.

One day it might happen to me. I saw no protection from it. There is an emptiness in a man without a woman. A vacuum in his life, and these women knew it. They felt it. They knew the exact moment when no more could be borne and then they were there. They struck as a snake strikes but there was no serum against them. This was the ancient temptation of a man's loins, the living thing, the one member beyond his control. Priests had fasted, had flagellated themselves, had immured themselves, had emasculated themselves in this endless war against Priapus, but only a priest could resist for ever the bodies of such women, if they passed continually before him. Women who brushed their hips against him. Who stood with their breasts tip-tilted before him, inviting him, laughing at him. Women who knew. Women who thought he was mad to resist.

These were the night thoughts. The moon was up now—a golden ball riding the sky.

The silence was broken with its light. The tomtoms louder, more compelling, the fireflies paler, their brightness stolen by the moon. There were the cries of occasional beasts in the forest. The killers, or the killed.

Bursts of sweet perfume came from the frangipanis. The garden was illuminated.

The plains looked like silver paper. Beyond them was the forest, inkblack, that divided them from the sky.

"You'll stay to dinner?" Henry said.

"Thank you," Colley said.

Henry called the boy and said, " Le père is staying to dinner." Colley was a Presbyterian but Henry always called him Father.

The boys brought the pressure lamp into the sitting-room and set it on its high stand. Then they took it down and pumped it up some more. I watched the light increase with the pressure through the fly-netted window. A big moth fluttered against the lamp glass. It threw a shadow as big as a bird against the white-washed wall. A bat swooped past my face with a rustle of leather wings. The light came through the windows in a yellow patch. Except for the dim lanterns and fires of the natives, there was scarcely another light for fifty miles.

Colley said, " Would you do something for me? "

We both said, " Yes."

" I wonder," he said.

" If we can help you . . ." Henry said.

Colley got up. " Would you pray? " he said.

Before we could answer he got down on the mud floor on his knees. We did the same, but more slowly. It was years since we had prayed. Colley said nothing aloud, but I could see his lips moving. I muttered what I remembered of the Lord's Prayer.

After a few minutes Colley got up. " Thank you," he said.

He put his hands on our shoulders as he stood between us, reaching up because he was much smaller than either of us. " I know how hard it was for you," he said. " But thank you. Thank you again."

Next day things looked very different. It was hard to believe in human leopards, in Colley, in the fact that we had knelt like children on our own stoep in prayer.

There was nothing sinister now in the patch of forest that crept, from its main impenetrable mass, out onto the open veld. Hard to believe that this brassy, burning world would ever be dark again; that night must fall, and the night thoughts come again.

We were in the throes of a drought. According to the Africans, the world of grass and trees was being throttled by the strong hands of the sun. The sun was male. The sun was angry because he was alone. He wanted to mate with the storm and produce his offspring of crops. If Colley was right this might account for the leopard murders—for the sacrifices; for the death of a selected individual so that a community might live. If there was no rain there would be famine.

Fortunately for us there was still plenty of grass, and though it was very dry it kept the stock alive. The river had not failed completely, so the cattle were all right.

This was what concerned us, but it was easy to see why the Africans were anxious. They were not cattle people and had little stock.

In the village under a big silk cotton tree the elders were grouped round the Chief. Their spears were driven butt first into the ground beside them. They chewed cola-nuts and tobacco and

spat. They were waiting. But waiting meant nothing to them since they knew nothing of time. They were content. Sometimes they passed round a gourd of palm wine. They had been in the same circumcision group as boys. They had hunted and fought together as young men. They were closer than brothers. Men of one age and one mind, of one experience.

No women or children were to be seen. They were in their huts or in the fields. They were afraid. Last night the fetish men had run through the village with their bullroarers and had beaten any women or children they found outside with long wands that were as thick as a man's finger.

A black-and-white short-legged goat wandered past them. An emaciated sow with dragging serrated teats, surrounded by her litter, dug hopelessly for roots. Everything was still, superficially normal, but there was a brooding atmosphere over the place, an invisible miasma.

An old man came towards the group. Three younger men followed him. Everyone knew he was coming, but no head was turned. He walked through the squatting elders with his young men behind him. He was a tall man, but bent and withered with age, shrunk on his ancient bones. Round his neck, encircling it several times and hanging to his belly, was a necklace of large odd-shaped coloured beads and coral. On his head was the head of a python. The skin came over his shoulders, went round his waist, and dragged like a train behind him. Below the snakeskin came a kilt of leopard and monkey tails mixed with strings of small dried tortoises, threaded one above the other, and the skulls of animals—rats, cats, monkeys, and birds. Round his ankles he wore iron rattles.

His guards were naked but for their loincloths and the white zebra strips of kaolin that marked their bodies. In their hands they carried whips made of great lizard tails barbed with leopard fangs.

The old man stopped in the centre of the group beside the Chief. He raised his hand. The elders raised their hands. A kind of deep sigh went through them. They moved on their haunches. The old man's will had passed over them like a wind over the corn, bending them, causing them to expel their breaths.

He said, " There is no rain."

They echoed, " No rain."

" There must be water," he said. " There must be moisture. Can the seed sprout in the dry ground? Can the nut increase, can the guinea-corn shoot without moisture? Can a man's seed be planted in an arid womb? "

" There must be water," they said.

" There must be rain. The sacred soil must be moist as a woman's womb, where the man's seed can grow, ripen, and burst forth like a fruit wrapped in its bloody pulp."

" Water," they said. " Water . . ."

" And blood," the old man said. " Without blood there can be

no birth, for is not the soil the womb of the gods? Is not all increase one increase—that of the crops, and the beasts, and the women? Can these mysteries be separated one from the other? Is not all fertility one fertility, all birth one birth, all increase one increase? Are there not seasons when the men must lie in the open fields with the women, when all men are one man, and all women one woman, and all increase one increase? A season when man's seed and blood must mix in the shadow of the sacred-trees. A season when all women are wives to all men and all men husbands to all women, as the soil is mother to every grain and is fertilized by the rain that falls upon all equally, blessing them with its moisture. Who can gainsay this? We know it in our hearts as our fathers knew it." He paused. Then he said, " Before the white man came there was rain. The yams were as big as elephants, the women's bellies were fat, the manioc carrots were like a strong man's arms."

" That is so," they said. " Before the white man came . . ."

" Before he came," the old man said, " the gods were served with blood."

" With blood," came the chorus.

" Is cocks' blood blood? " he asked.

" It is not blood."

" Or the goats'? or the bulls'? Are these blood? "

" They are not blood."

" There is only one blood that is acceptable to the gods," he said. " The blood of the goat without horns. The blood of a man or a woman or a child. This all men know. But it is now forbidden by the white man . . ."

" It is forbidden," they said.

He said, " But the forest is large. It is dark."

" It is dark and large."

" It is secret," he said.

" It is secret," they said.

" And we have the means. We have the leopards back among us. They have returned. Once again the gods have sent them to serve us in the ancient manner."

He drew himself up. He seemed to grow. He seemed to become young again, lissom, his skin seemed to pale to yellow, dark spots appeared to come out on it, his eyes to turn green and blaze. He moved through the elders with his followers behind him. They, too, seemed to have changed. They did not walk as men out of the group, they slunk like leopards, silently on velvet pads, delicately, soundlessly, touching no one.

No one saw them go. One minute they were there, the next they were gone. In the dust there was the dragged spoor of a great snake.

In his little hospital the Reverend Franklin Collison was talking to the girl. He had done everything he could for her but she was worse. In a few days she would be dead. She was afraid to live. But he wanted her story. He wanted to hear it again to check it. To be certain.

"You were going to meet a man?"

"Yes," she said.

"That is why you were dressed like that?" He meant in native costume and oiled with castor oil instead of in the white mission blouse and skirt.

"Yes," she said.

"And you met him in the forest as arranged?"

"Yes."

"Then it was he who . . .?"

"Yes." He knew this was a lie. It was not her lover.

"And the leopard?"

"That was afterwards. It sprang upon me."

"It was a real leopard?"

"Oh yes, it was a real leopard."

"Then what you told me was not true?"

"No, it was a lie. I am sorry. Soon I shall die so I do not wish to lie any more. I am a good Christian girl."

"You will not die."

"I shall die," she said. "There is no other way."

"Way of what?"

"Of ending this thing."

"Then there is a thing?"

"Oh no. There is no thing. It is only that I am afraid."

He knelt beside her bed. God help her. God help them all. He knew what had happened. She had gone out to meet a lover dressed only in a loincloth and pagne—a cloth like a tablecloth—wrapped around her. She had been freshly oiled with castor oil. That was how she had managed to escape when the leopard-man had raped her. He had probably been frightened by her lover, who had heard her cries, and she had slipped out of his grasp.

But now she would acknowledge none of it. She knew that if she did get well she would be killed by the leopard-men, or by poison. This time there would be no mistake. In her mind the leopard-men were leopards. Christian baptism had not destroyed her belief in lycanthropy.

So she would die because she would will herself to die. She knew there was no point in living because death would only be delayed. Those condemned must die and it was easier to die here in the mission hospital. To die peacefully instead of terribly. To die painlessly.

Colley knew he could not save her. No one could save her. But if the leopard-men were unappeased there would be a new victim. And what was the good of this story now? Where was the evidence? Who were the witnesses? The authorities would believe nothing. They would not want to believe. The Leopard Society is stamped out, they would say. It is finished. It belonged to the old days.

Henry was working on his stock-books and accounts. In a week it would all be over. He was going on leave. Six months away

from all this. From the cattle that he loved, from Marie-Thérèse with whom he lived. From the sun and the heat of the dry season, and the damp of the wet. He was excited. England called to him. London, Piccadilly; the sunken lanes of Devon; the Yorkshire moors. But he knew that when it was time to come back he would be glad. He had cut himself off from all that.

I was really rather excited about Henry's going. He was getting on my nerves badly. It would be a relief not to have to watch him eat breakfast for a few months. It was the way he ate boiled eggs that got me. He did not crack an egg sharply and then take off its top neatly in one piece. He did not pulverize it and pull off the shell attached to the membrane. He broke it low down so that the yolk always ran out down its side onto the white egg-cup and dribbled onto the plate. It was revolting, disgusting.

It was no use saying one shouldn't take a dislike to a man because of the way he ate a boiled egg. One did. One couldn't help it. I had become almost hysterical about it. I tried to avoid him at breakfast but it seldom worked. If I had it late he was late too. I had tried to rationalize it. It's the climate, I thought. Everyone knows what it does to you. Well, even if it was the climate it didn't make things any better. It might explain it but it changed nothing.

I was not worried about taking over the herds from him. I was a good stockman. Not as good as he was. I could never have organized the place, but I could keep it running till he got back.

" You'll be lonely," he said.

I said, " I'll manage."

" You've never been alone like this before," he said. " I have and I know what it's like."

" There's Colley," I said.

" Yes," he said, " there's Colley."

I knew he was thinking about Marie-Thérèse, but he didn't mention her. He was more worried about his guns.

" You'll take care of them, won't you? Keep them in grease unless you're using them."

I said, " Yes. I don't suppose I'll want them. I never use them. Anyway, I've got my own."

" But nothing heavy," he said.

" No," I said.

" And be careful with bush cow."

I said, " I shan't shoot any buck."

He could never understand why I had given up shooting. I had been in the shooting eight at school too. And a better shot than he was. It had been easier to tell him my eyes had gone, that I could only use a shotgun now, than explain that I had come to hate killing. That I had done too much of it. I knew that he was thinking that the guns were valuable, irreplaceable, and that Marie-Thérèse was not.

It was a curious thought.

She'd belonged to other white men before. A trader had taken

her to Leo, but when Henry came, her family had got her back. They were afraid of her becoming a prostitute on her own and keeping her earnings. So when a vacancy—that is to say, a white man alone—turned up near home, they sent for her. He had paid her father for her, of course, and it would be good to have someone in the white man's house, in his bed, to tell them what he was doing.

That was the way their minds worked. A woman was just a thing. Like a gun, only not worth so much. Their minds and Henry's were at one on this subject. A girl was just so much cash, so many hoes or spears, so many bottles of gin. And with a girl in a white man's house you not only had a spy, but when he went away you could sell her again to someone else.

There were great advantages in having an educated daughter. Marie-Thérèse had been brought up in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, fifty miles away. That was where the trader had found her. Yes, a girl like that was a gold mine. Her father was a lucky man.

To her it was all a matter of complete indifference as long as she belonged to a white man who gave her plenty of new pagnes, good food, and did not beat her too much. The one thing she would not do was to return to tribal life, to work in the fields and carry wood and water like an animal. She spat when she thought of those women. Like animals. Monsieur Henri was a good man. He gave her plenty of perfume, cola-nuts to chew, cigarettes to smoke, and gin when she asked for it. Oh yes, a good man.

Whom she slept with did not matter; she had no feelings about that. She had been circumcised and got no pleasure. But she had been trained in the Poro bush to give pleasure, before the mission got her. They had taken her late and she had not stayed long. But she had learnt some French, how to wash and iron her clothes, and eat with implements in the way of the white people. She knew Monsieur Henri was going. She hoped he would bring her back some nice presents—necklaces and brooches, and perhaps some new records for the gramophone . . .

The drought broke soon after Henry left. There was no more talk of leopard-men. I followed the usual routine of dipping and counting stock, of paying wages, of doctoring sick cattle, of branding, earmarking, cutting, and weaning calves.

There was no excitement. The days passed, and the nights. Marie-Thérèse made infantile attempts to seduce me. I resisted her without difficulty. Not that she cared, as long as she had food and drink, cigarettes, and the gramophone to play. Her efforts had been made without enthusiasm and had been repulsed in the same spirit. It was curious that the twinges of desire I had had when Henry was there ceased when he left. I was astonished at my virtue, or was it fastidiousness? Either way the result was the same. I saw a lot of Colley. In my way I was happy, insulated from the outside world with its problems.

The mornings were often very beautiful. Mist covered the world like a white sea, out of which the little tree-clad hilltops rose like islands. The veld was green. There were wild flowers—

gladioli, tall pink orchis, and flowering shrubs and trees. Africa was in one of her gentler moods. I should have been warned by this calm-before-the-storm feeling, but I did not know enough then to fear life when there were no troubles.

A young man is like an animal. He does not believe in death or disaster. Whatever happens, he will survive. I did not know that when things are going well you should ride your luck, but go easy as you do it.

That above all a man must never call attention to himself by saying how well things are going.

The stock had done well. We had had few losses and the head office was very satisfied with my reports. They talked of starting up a new herd in another area . . .

Our homestead was comfortable. Built of whitewashed mud and poles with a thick roof of thatch that came down in the front and the back, shading the verandahs like a hat. There were three rooms. A long living-room in the middle, with two bedrooms, one at either end, opening off it. On the back stoep there was a bathroom, and a tiny room that Marie-Thérèse used when she was not with Henry. She kept it closed. A big galvanized padlock fastened the hasp and staple on the door.

She wore the key on a string round her waist, tucked into her loincloth. God knows what treasures she had concealed in there, what loot, what secret pickings besides her pagnes and headcloths, which she kept in a tin trunk that was painted white and spotted with round dots of Reckitt's blue.

The houseboys had a hut fifty yards away and the cook-house stood between the boys' quarters and the back stoep. Behind the boys' house came the horse stable, the store-rooms, the dip, the home kraals, and the sheds where we could keep any sick beasts under observation.

In front we had our garden, which consisted chiefly of flowering trees and shrubs—bohinia, flame trees, pride of Barbados, frangipani, moon flower, hibiscus, poinsettia, all the usual common stuff. Cannas were about the only flowers that grew well, or at least that would grow without trouble. Climbing the verandah pillars, bougainvillaeas, both red and purple, poured their arterial gushes of colour over the thatch.

Pictorially, the ranch-house left little to be desired. It had a kind of exotic, savage, Christmas-card appearance. It stood out like a jewel set in a crown of moss. It was only when you looked closely—and I no longer looked—that you noticed things which are not to be found in a Christmas-card cottage. The white walls were stained red by the veins of the white ants' galleries. We knocked them off almost every day, but they started again, and left behind them the faint, double pink line of their foundations as a reminder of their persistence. Then of course there were scorpions and centipedes and tarantulas and rats; moths as big as my hand, big blundering beetles, flies, and mosquitoes.

But you got used to all these things. Used to shaking out your

boots before you put them on; to keeping your eye open for anything unusual, such as a snake coiled up on a chair. That had happened once. But the risks were really negligible.

The furniture in the house was better than is usual under such circumstances. Fatty Seaman had taste. The chairs and tables were all of native wood made by African craftsmen at a Catholic mission near Leo. They were dark, almost black, and took a good polish. There were skins on the polished red granolithic floor: lion, zebra, kudu, and sable. There was a fine leopardskin, with its legs extended, nailed to the wall. Other leopardskins hung over the backs of the chairs.

The walls were decorated with innumerable trophies of the chase: horned heads, the whitened skulls rather sinister with their empty eye sockets, open nostrils, and bared teeth. Henry had a gorilla skull and two chimps on a shelf. They looked very human —a continual reminder of our simian past. He got them when he was working in French Territory. I am inclined to think he had killed them himself, although he said he hadn't.

There is a certain prejudice against people who kill anthropoid apes for sport, in addition to its being illegal in all territories except in self-defence. This was of course not only due to their rarity and manlike appearance, but because the natives were very fond of eating them and this, for obvious reasons, was discouraged by the authorities, as they were said to taste like men. Henry was a fine shot and hunting was one of his great interests, and I never really made up my mind about it one way or the other. Below the dado of heads and horns was a very decorative arrangement of native weapons. Spears, kerries, shields, knives, machetes, swords, and guns. Long-barrelled Arab guns bound with brass, Dane guns, old tower muskets, ancient elephant guns.

I was pleased at how well I stood the solitude. I read a great deal. I cut my drinking down to one whisky-and-soda. I was careful, too, about my appearance. My baths, my hair that Colley cut for me. I shaved every day and wore clean clothes . . .

But finally the loneliness of the bush penetrates the heart. Time is lost in the monotony of the veld. Without society a man ceases to exist as a man. He is cut off from his past by the knife of his isolation. He no longer has friends or relatives. He has nothing. Nothing matters.

He becomes one with this emptiness, with the beasts that he tends, with the wild animals, with the savages with whom he shares this vastness. He is integrated into a universe, his personality merged into what is called nature. And against this is set, or at least it was in my case, a sense of pent-up strength, of fury, of waiting like a caged animal for some outlet, for a way out.

In the wilds, till he loses his temper, a civilized man is compressed like a coiled spring. He is aware that somewhere in him there is a trigger and he wonders what will set it off . . .

One evening, when Colley came to dine, he brought me a letter from Henry. I opened it at once in case it needed an answer.

Colley sent to the Beach quite often. There was quite a coming-and-going between the mission and the outer world.

Dear Jim—Henry wrote—*I have some news for you. I am married and bringing my wife back in two months' time. Please clean the place up—my room and so on, and tidy the compound. Maybe you'd better whitewash the house too.*

The rest was just business about the cattle, and he hoped his guns were not rusting.

I said, " He's bringing back a wife, Colley."

" So he's married," Colley said. " It will mean big changes."

I knew he meant Marie-Thérèse. She was never mentioned directly between us. She was merely accepted.

The next few weeks were busy ones. We had rather let things slide and there were a lot of minor repairs to make. Holes in the walls to be patched. But whitewash covers a multitude of sins. Sometimes I felt the house was supported by its multiple skins of whitewash. I did nothing about Marie-Thérèse. He had not mentioned her. But I had no doubt that she knew.

By the time I took the truck to meet them—how funny the *them* sounded in my ears—the place looked pretty good. I was proud of it. I was not particularly preoccupied with wondering what she looked like. Or pretended that I wasn't. She, the nameless, faceless, formless one, who was joining us, who lived like castaways on this flower-embowered raft in a jungle sea. The stranger. The

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IN ARGOSY ON SALE JULY 10

woman. She might be anything. I wondered what she would make of it and of us.

I hoped she would not be beautiful. Not beautiful enough to disturb me. I hoped she would have a pretty voice. I was very voice-conscious. And now I was going to meet her.

There is always some excitement in a man's heart when he goes to meet a strange woman, even if she is another man's wife.

I made the boys give the truck a good wash, in spite of knowing that by the time I reached the Beach it would be as dirty as ever. I shaved more carefully than usual, though I should have to shave again tomorrow before the boat came in. I packed one of my good shirts to put on for the meeting.

Henry said, " This is Helen."

I said, " Hullo, old boy." I shook her hand and said, " How do you do? I hope you had a good trip."

Her hand was very soft with long fingers. The nails were long, almond-shaped, and painted red.

I called the boys to get the gear into the truck. They piled everything in and got in themselves. There was quite a bit of stuff for the ranch at the store, as well as Henry's things. Dip, three bags of concentrates for the bulls, kerosene, paint, and a keg of nails. The usual things. But I had loaded them earlier.

I went over to Erikson, the captain of the little wood-burner that had brought them up the river.

" Hullo," I said.

" Hullo, Jim," he said. " Quite a change there'll be now, hein? With her in the 'ome, ja? A beauty," he said, " he's got himself a beauty. But I wonder how smart it is to do such a thing. And you wonder too, hein? Flowers like that grow in the cement, my friend, not in the bush. But it will be to watch interesting, I think—no? "

I said, " Oh yes. Most interesting." I did not really care for Erikson. He was half Swedish and half Dutch. A good man when sober. Therefore seldom a good man. But even drunk he knew his job as a river captain.

A beauty, he'd said. Well, perhaps she was. I hadn't really taken her in. She had not looked at me when we were introduced. Her eyes had been downcast. I'd noticed her long lashes. Her soft hand had seemed boneless in mine. I had an impression of an almost, but not quite, boyish slimness.

" Come on! " Henry shouted.

I got into the truck. There was room for us all on the front seat. Henry drove. Helen was next to him and I sat on the outside. There was room, but only just room, and I was very conscious of Helen. Her thigh against mine seemed very soft and warm.

She was wearing a dark blue silk dress with a design of white suns and half moons on it. She had no stockings on and wore white buckskin shoes with high heels. She had beautiful legs. They were slim and muscular. Beautiful ankles. A high instep

that showed her bones and a faint blue tracery of veins. Round her waist she wore a wide white buckskin belt. The dress was short-sleeved and her arms looked thin and childish. She must be very young, I thought. Her hands lay open, one on top of the other, on her lap. I looked at her face. Erikson had been right —she was a beauty.

She had taken off her hat, a white double terai. Her hair, which had a natural wave, was long, ash-blonde, with patches of a lighter shade. She turned towards me; her eyes met mine. They were big, grey, and set very far apart in a heart-shaped face. Her mouth was wide but pretty, and sensitive when she smiled. She had small, very even, very white teeth.

Then she looked away again, staring ahead down the track. So this is Helen, I thought. The girl whose room I had got ready. I thought of the flowers I had put on her dressing-table. I had had no idea what sort of woman Henry would bring back, but I had not expected anyone like this. I wondered how Henry had got her. She was a city girl. A flower of the pavements.

The trip was curiously silent. None of us spoke much. Each was occupied with his or her own thoughts.

Henry said, " Everything all right? "

I said, " Yes."

He said, " No losses? "

" Only the normal," I said.

" Wild, isn't it, Helen? " Henry said.

She said, " Yes, you told me it would be." She had a soft voice.

I wondered if he'd told her how wild it really was. How isolated. I said, " I fixed up your room. I put in flowers."

She said, " Thank you. How kind you are."

I didn't feel kind.

The trip took six hours. I had come the day before and slept in the truck to meet the boat at the landing. Pedro, the Portuguese half-caste who kept the store, had entertained me. On the way back we had a picnic lunch and stopped a couple of other times to stretch our legs. When I'd seen Helen look about in a rather hopeless sort of way and then start off towards the bush I told her to wait till I'd gone ahead to have a look around.

There was no point in being modest about these things. When I came back Henry said, " Quite a ladies' man, aren't you? "

I thought he should have done it himself, but didn't say so. Instead I said, " She's not used to things yet. Suppose there was a snake or something? "

" Not likely," he said. " There are not so many snakes."

" I know," I said, " but there might be. Or ants."

The idea of ants seemed to amuse him.

I tried to imagine what a city-bred girl would think of the bush we were driving through. Harsh savannah, open plains, patches of dark, primary forest. Nothing that resembled in any way what we call the country at home. Not even the moors had this savagery. The grass was not like our grass, the trees not like our trees.

Helen seemed to take it all as a matter of course, and expressed neither interest nor surprise. I think she was too tired really to take things in, or that her capacity for surprise was used up. Everything, including the voyage, must have been so new and strange.

When we could see the house I pointed it out to her. " There you are! " I said.

" That's Lukika," Henry said.

" How pretty it is! " she said.

And it was, in the light of late afternoon, on fire with bougainvillaea, golden shower, and cannas.

I helped her down from the truck. Henry came out heavily. In the Congo most people either put on weight or lose it. Very few people keep their normal weight. Always fat, he was now gross. He had put on more weight on his holiday.

I led the way. She followed me. Then Henry came, and after him the boys with the luggage. The big living-room looked very comfortable and homey. I had put flowers there, too. I was glad to see they had lasted. I flung open the door of Henry's room.

" Your room," I said.

I left her at the door as Henry reached us. I called to the boy to bring hot water and the drinks.

" Dinner in an hour," I said. " Is that all right for you? "

" That's fine," Henry said.

When they came out they had both changed. Henry into the usual khaki shirt and trousers, Helen into a white frock that made her look even more fragile and ethereal. We had drinks. Whisky-and-soda. She didn't like whisky so I gave her a Dubonnet. I don't think she liked that either, but she needed something to pick her up. We had peanuts, and biscuits spread with tinned cheese.

Then we had dinner. I was rather proud of it all. The look of the house, my catering arrangements. The dinner began with chicken broth—about all the local chickens were fit for—fish from the river—rather bony but still edible—and bush fowl cooked with red wine. I'd shot them before I left yesterday. They were really francolin—double-spurred Senegal francolin—rather like large partridges. The sweet was a jelly which had not set properly, and canned cream. It made a rather pretty mush that looked like strawberries-and-cream and tasted of raspberries. We ended up with coffee. With the meal, we drank the red Portuguese wine that we got in bulk from Pedro.

There was very little conversation. What should have been a festive meal, the first of a bride in her new home, did not work out that way. Henry was pompous and talked about the people he'd met and the shows he'd seen. Helen said practically nothing.

I asked her where she came from.

She said, " Bournemouth."

I tried to place her. But it's hard to place people who don't say anything. She ate nicely but stuck out her little finger when she drank.

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I wanted to know all I could about her. I couldn't understand how Henry had found her, or why she had married him. At that time I don't suppose, excluding missionaries, there were a hundred white women in the whole colony. I decided she might have worked in a shop or beauty parlour, or have been a typist. A typist would be useful on the ranch.

After dinner we sat around and had a few more drinks. We had whiskies again and I introduced Helen to grenadine-and-soda. She sat very still, sipping her drink and smoking a cigarette in a long imitation-amber holder.

She jumped when a big beetle crashed into the lamp and fell on the floor near her. I picked him up and chucked him outside. I thought it was a pity that the first one should be so big. If I'd squashed him on the floor the way I might have done had we been alone, the mess and the noise of his being mashed might have upset her.

It would be interesting to see the effect she was going to have on our behaviour. A civilizing influence, I thought. All civilization, when one came to think about it, was dependent on women. On mothers and wives. They set the standards at home which might be why most of us were so relieved to go back to the wilds again . . .

It was a long time since I had seen anyone so lovely. Helen would have been remarkable anywhere. She had the quality that would make men turn and look back over their shoulders if they passed her in any street. The quality that makes men feel they have missed something. That their lives are drab.

When a sausage fly landed on Helen's lap, I picked it off and squashed it on the floor. She had not moved, but I saw her bite her lip. That touch had set me on fire. To pick it up I'd had to press my fingers into the flesh of her thigh.

Henry said to her, " You'll have to learn to do that sort of thing for yourself, and remember, if ever you get a centipede on you, brush it forward, not back."

" Forward? " she said.

" Yes, darling. The way it's going. If you don't it'll sting you with all its legs."

He looked very bland, his face was red with drink and the sun. His shining hair was almost white in the half-lit room.

What's the matter with him, I thought. He's torturing her. The place was odd enough, as far as she was concerned, without that. The horns on the wall threw twisted shadows, the weapons, where they caught the light, shone menacingly. And outside, the damn tomtoms were louder than usual. Then they stopped and a big drum began to beat. You could feel it, as much as hear it. The dull throb vibrated in the room, as if it were a soundbox. It was like the war, when one felt the big guns before one heard them.

" What's that, Henry? " she asked.

" Talking drums," he said.

" What are they saying? "

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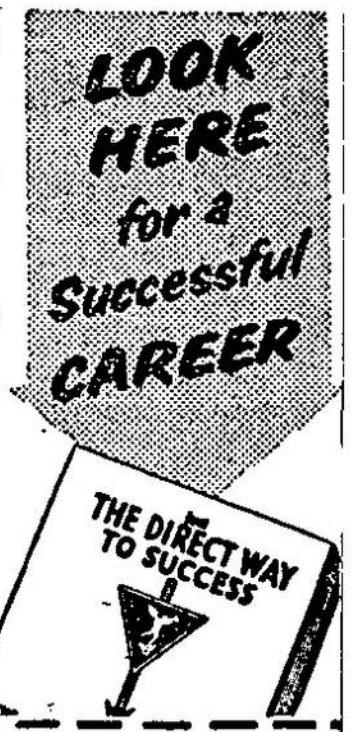

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" No idea," he said. " But I can guess. They are talking about you. Saying that I have brought back a white wife from over the sea."

" Strange place, isn't it? " I said. " But you'll get used to it. There's nothing to worry about."

" What does one do here? " she asked.

" Do? " Henry said. " Nothing. There's nothing to do."

" No people? "

" No one but us," he said, " and old Colley at the mission."

She said, " Oh, I see." Then she said, " I know you told me it was lonely, but I'd no idea it was quite so far from everything."

" We're on our own here," Henry said.

I had been more or less right in my guess about Helen. Her father had been the accountant to some small firm of importers in the City of London. He had died without having made any provision for his wife and daughter. His insurance had been allowed to lapse. My own idea was that he had tried to live at a far higher rate than was justified by his earnings, in the hope that Helen would make a good marriage. Everything had been sacrificed to appearances. Once she was safe he would be able to relax and live simply. Unfortunately he'd popped off before this happened. His wife soon followed, and Helen had cashed in on the one thing she did really well—dancing. She had been very well taught and became a dance hostess and taxi-dancer. My feeling was that by the time Henry met her she was several men away from being a virgin.

Once I had worked it all out I was not surprised. He could never have got an ordinary, respectable girl to marry him. He could never have persuaded a girl whose parents were alive to go off to the Congo after a few weeks' acquaintance.

Helen had not been particularly interested when the fat, fair man in a dinner-jacket had asked for a dance. She'd said, " Thank you, I'd like to dance." That was what she was paid to do. He had his ticket in his hand. He had bought the right to hold her in his arms as long as they kept moving, to tread on her feet, even to fumble around a bit and to make veiled or not-so-veiled suggestions about afterwards. It was all routine. She knew all the lines. Nothing could surprise her now.

But he did. First by the way he danced. It was like dancing with another professional. Suddenly, incredible as it might seem, she was enjoying dancing again. Something she had never believed possible.

And then he had proposed. Proposed not a night in a hotel, not a weekend somewhere, but marriage.

" Love at first sight," he said.

" You dance very well," she had said.

He succeeded in inclining his body towards her as they danced. Clumsy as a bear when walking, Henry was remarkable when dancing, a miracle of speed and grace. He might have had built-in

skates on his feet as he swept along, floated, and turned. He was rather like a polar bear when it gets into the water. It is no longer the same animal.

When he had turned the full power of his charm and personality on to this pretty, rather shop-worn, and lonely little creature, he swept her off her feet and into his bed in a series of small hotels; and, when he found her satisfactory there, to a registry office, where he took out a licence to sleep with her anywhere, at any time, in much the same spirit as he would have taken out a licence for a dog that he had bought because its appearance had pleased him and he enjoyed its tricks.

But to her he was Prince Charming. He was Perseus to her Andromeda, delivering her, cutting the pink chains of those rolls of tickets that had chained her to the rock of exhausting indignity. It was Henry's chance to be worshipped.

She had been at it long enough to know how lucky a dance-hall girl was to get married to anyone. Anyone at all. Henry had made the Congo sound so romantic. Made himself sound so fine. A pioneer, an explorer.

Her home had been in the London suburbs, in Golders Green. Her work had been in Kensington. I never found out how she had got down to Bournemouth. Probably some man took her there and ditched her. I never asked her any questions. I found out indirectly, by putting the little things she said together and making a picture of her life. Anyway, I saw as little of her as I could. Which was not easy, living in the same house and not wanting to hurt her by avoiding her too obviously.

I had the feeling that Henry was watching me. Or us. Playing a kind of cat-and-mouse game. Dangling sexual opportunity before us as if it were a carrot.

I never really understood Henry. He had, as I have said, this passion for practical jokes. He seemed completely indifferent to other people's feelings, and although one knew this, it was hard to feel that he really meant any harm.

I was at that time still suffering from the Falstaff delusion, that the fat are really good-natured. Heaven knows, Henry smiled and laughed enough.

I think he wanted a situation to develop so that he could exploit it in some peculiar, humorous fashion. If we fell for each other he would have more power over both of us. A whip he could crack. Particularly if we did not know whether he knew or not . . .

To keep my mind off Helen, I approached Marie-Thérèse. I found it less hard than I had imagined.

While Henry was away I had not touched her, but now, excited as I was by the white woman, the mood was too strong to be killed.

As if she knew my mind, Marie-Thérèse drenched herself in perfume that she stole from Helen. So the two girls smelt the same.

When we told Helen there would be a thunderstorm in a few days she had seemed glad.

" It will break the heat, won't it? " she said, wiping some beads of sweat away from her forehead.

There had been thunderstorms in Golders Green. There were storms everywhere. Helen's father used to say, " There is going to be a storm. We must bring in the garden chairs."

" What we need is a fan—if we had electricity," Henry said.

I said, " Yes. Like having bacon and eggs for breakfast if we had any bacon." We had tried bacon but it always went rancid.

But our storms were not like that. They had personality. They were savage expressions of wrath. First, heat; unbearable heat, which was so filled with electricity that every nerve was set on edge. The heat was an invisible, smothering blanket. It was as hot at night as in the day, for in the night the ground gave up its heat. And all the time, day and night, men sweated, were awakened by the sweat running down their backs, running between their breasts, between their thighs. Then we used a Dutch wife, a kind of bolster that you hold in your arms and stuff between your legs, blotting up your sweat like blotting-paper, absorbing the spilt, colourless, acrid-smelling ink of your body. Before you get your shirt on, it sticks to you. It is black with sweat.

The sky is still cloudless. Then small clouds, like scattered sheep on a blue pasture, appear. They are the heralds. They amalgamate, form platoons, companies, pile themselves into voluptuous, dangerous armies. They are still white, but gold-tipped, with tinges of red as if touched with blood. They pile themselves ever higher as if in anger. They darken into grey, into purple, with rage. They are suffused, like the face of an angry man. Soon they cover the sky. And it is dark. The morning is like evening.

We move through this hot gunmetal-coloured world with a sense of unreality, of impending doom. We do not feel that our God, our Christ, operates here—not in this Africa.

Suddenly we understand why the Africans sacrifice goats and cattle and men. Their gods demand blood, will be satisfied with nothing less. The sky comes down nearer to the earth, brooding over it like some gigantic, dark, grey-feathered fowl. Then everything is still. Even the cicadas are hushed. The birds fly no longer for they think that night is coming and seek their perches.

Poor Helen was less happy about the storm now. It was not like storms at home. Nor was this hush before it. It was not a hush. It was a kind of death. Her pink dress was stained dark purple. Sweat ran down her face. She rubbed it out of her eyes. When she put up her hands it ran in little drops, hanging on the peach down of her forearms and, gathering strength, raced in rivulets down to the bend of her elbows. We all smelt of sweat. Her perfume did not disguise it. It only made it female. The chair-backs were black with it. The leopardskins, where we had leaned against them, matted.

Everything was battened down as far as it was possible. Nothing was left loose about the place. A sheet of corrugated iron, picked

up by the wind, would cut a man in two like a great flat sword. I had seen it happen.

The sky darkened to indigo, the horizon became red. The red blended with the almost navy-blue of the clouds into sepia. The wind was coming. The storm always rode the wind as if it were a horse, a great stallion. The red was the dust of its gallop as it tore over the veld. We could hear it come, screaming, whistling.

The doors and windows were closed but some got in. Stragglers of wind, as it were. The house seemed to rock, to crouch under the onset. It seemed to realize what a small, manmade thing it really was when confronted with the exaggerated elements.

Outside, the trees whipped and then bent almost double, like slaves beneath the scorpion whips of the wind which stripped them naked, violently, as men in haste might strip women taken in a raid. The air was full of leaves and driven rubbish. A hawk, the master of the peaceful air, was flung like a blowing newspaper against a tree. Branches were torn off with great strips of bark, like skin, still hanging to them. There was distant thunder that rolled like the drumfire of cannon. Oh, this was war! A war of elementals. Of the air gods against the earth gods. Of all the gods combined against mankind. Then came the smell of sulphur, of brimstone, as if the gates of hell had been opened. All-penetrating, it swept through the house.

Helen cried out. " It smells of sulphur! " she said.

I knew she wanted to come to my arms, and since she could not she crouched in her chair, drawing up her legs so that I could see the underside of her childish thighs. She made herself as small as she could. She was shaped like an egg, like a curled fœtus, when the rain came. It struck us like a hammer, an iron blow of a hundred million driven drops, welded by the storm into solidity. Suddenly we were fish encysted in a capsule in a raging tank. Outside it was all water. There was no room for air. We could hardly breathe, and then it grew cold. The heat had gone, killed by the violence of the tempest. Nothing, not even heat, could stand against it. The sweat on us turned icy. We shivered.

Overhead the thunder exploded, shaking the house, vibrating through it. Clap on clap, explosion on deafening explosion. The ears no longer heard them. They were only felt. Outside, it was light with the blue of the lightning that came down all round us, audibly hissing like gigantic snakes, striking wildly at the unwilling earth, driving electricity, driving life into it, as if it were a womb. Then for an instant it would be darker than night by contrast, and then the darkness was split again, riven by the zigzag forks of lightning that smashed the sky, shattering it like a plate with a pattern of awful cracks.

In the forest, I knew, the great trees were shivering, unable to bend. The oldest would break and fall, their crash inaudible in the roar of the storm. Others would strain at the lianas that held them, as the masts of a ship whip and strain at the rigging in a storm at sea. The savage leopards would be crouched in their

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lairs, frightened as fawns, with flattened ears, their spotted fur black with moisture. The buck, too, would be lying pressed down into the grass with fear.

Only the lions, kings of the storm, would be on the move, stalking on great soft pads through the rain. The great yellow lions, their mouths half open, their thorn-tipped tails flicking, happy with thoughts of the hot arterial blood and meat that would come to them so easily on a night like this.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the storm was over. There was silence, broken only by Helen's sobs and the sound of rushing water. The whole world was weeping. The earth, the girl. Every path was a stream, every stream a river, every river a raging torrent. The trees were dripping their tears.

I got my jacket and found coats for Helen and Henry, and sat down. I felt a great emptiness. A great desire to hold her, to touch her. I knew she was my love now. I had read her thoughts which, liberated by fear, had flown like suddenly released birds from the cage of her heart.

Only in a woman can a man find release for his fear. And I had been frightened, too. Only a fool is not frightened when so near to the gods. I wanted her warmth, her softness. The feeling that she was more frightened than I, that I could comfort her. Perhaps courage depends upon the fear of others.

All night the water ran, draining away from the high ground. The morning light showed a pulpy world, a green, mashed spinach-like world of flattened grass and fallen leaves that began, with the sun's first heat, to rot. The earth was coated with a rotting, steaming sponge. And as one thing rotted, others grew. Everything started to grow now—fantastically, obscenely. Great, fat, leeklike shoots sprang up from hidden bulbs, tree buds burst open into new leaves and blossoms, the palms unsheathed their new green swords and daggers.

It was a green, growing world, curiously sinister, livid with menace. It was as if the earth felt it must cover itself quickly with a new skin of foliage to protect its nakedness. So it grew scar tissue —shaggy, tough, like a lion's mane, like the tufts on his elbows.

This was the earth. And its denizens, no less hysterical, plunged into an orgy of mating. The birds, the beasts, the butterflies. The insects increased. Thousands of beetles appeared, as if released by the opening of a door. There were flies by the thousand. Great caterpillars crawled over the glaucous leaves, or hung their nets over gigantic trees, covering them, like the furniture of an empty house, with fibrous sheets. There were clouds of ants that seethed in nuptial flight. The wild bees swarmed and began new nests in the hollow trees. With the rest of nature, man's blood, too, pounded in his veins.

The night thoughts persisted into the day, became daydreams, day nightmares, that tore the bowels apart with an intolerable mating hunger, that Marie-Thérèse calmed but neither allayed nor satisfied. Warmly moist, female, she was not to me woman, not

the desire of my heart or mind. For this is the white man's curse, that he must think of his love between the satisfactions of his lust. That his love is omnipresent. In all things. The fork he uses may have been in her mouth. Her hand has touched the doorknob. The same fingers that have touched his body. Her name occurs in a book and twists his heart into a knot. The lipstick on a cup edge or a cigarette stub is invested with romance.

Marie-Thérèse was not my love, my woman. She was my failing, something I resisted till the zenith of unbearable desire was reached. Then I was disgusted. And then, slowly, as desire mounted again, I remembered the release she offered, the door to peace and sleep that she opened. So it went, the graph of my lust rising and falling like a slowly mounting and descending fever chart.

There was nothing admirable about it. Nothing innocent. Nothing in which it differed from the animal loves of the beasts, or of the Africans themselves, except that I knew what I did as I did it, and afterwards also.

My life was one long reproach.

It is seldom understood how life in Africa tests men. That is its charm, its danger, its attraction. It brings out the hidden weaknesses in a man. It is a continuous challenge. At home men and women can go through life without ever knowing if they are brave or cowardly, kind or cruel. Life does not really touch them. At home temptation seldom hangs like a fruit, ready to the hand. At home there are alternatives.

In Africa there is no choice. It is a matter of doing something or dying, or going mad.

My desire was for Helen. It was now no use my trying to avoid this truth. So that which was aroused by one woman was spent upon another. Each time I took the black woman I committed adultery against the white. In trying to save myself I destroyed myself in this land of heat and paradox.

I think Henry knew and enjoyed it, for he took great pains not to hide their intimacies. It amused him to torture me and see me turn to his discarded mistress for release.

And he did not torture me alone. Helen loved me. Since the night of the storm she had been unable to disguise her feelings. We looked at each other and away again. We approached each other and then turned back before it was too late.

And when I had gone to visit Pedro he had asked, "Well, how are things with you, my friend?"

"They are good," I had answered. "Everyone is well and we have no sickness or losses with the stock."

I did not like the knowing leer in his eyes, the greasy smile on his dark face.

"It will not last, monsieur," he said. "Two men and one woman, if she is beautiful, is against nature . . ."

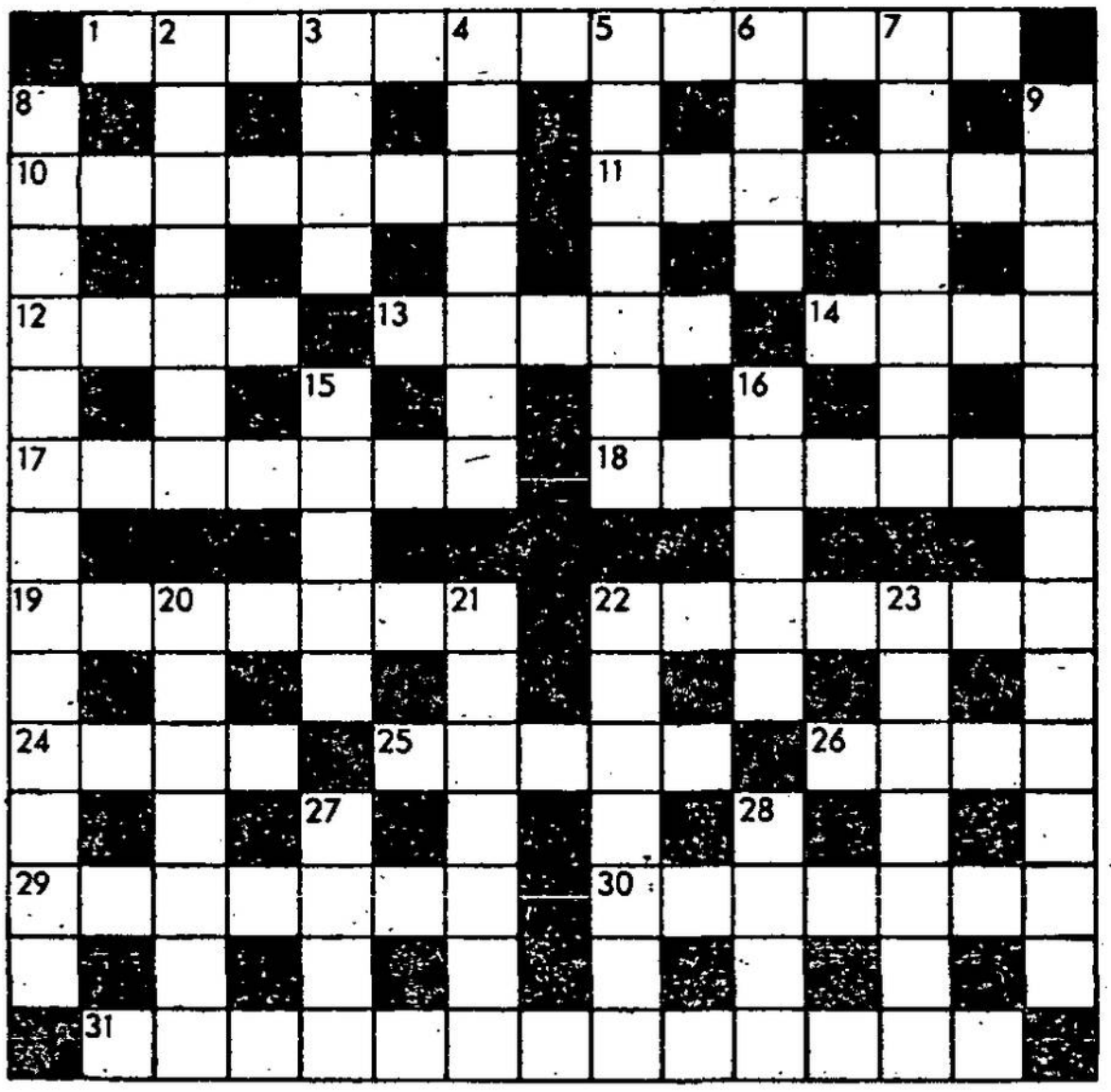
★ ***The Second Part of Mamba, by Stuart Cloete, appears in next month's Argosy on sale July 10***

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 102

★



CLUES

Across

1 Vocal exaggeration (13).

10 Repudiated, as the sailor swore (7).

11 " People call a —— age " (Byron) (7).

12 Laura loses her head and creates an atmosphere (4).

13 It's pretty shabby out at these joints (5).

14 Tower inclined to be famous (4).

17 The doctor took an awl to Ed (7).

18 Blake's mills were (7).

19 It puts the spring in Castile (7).

22 It's in Hants, over and over (7).

24 " ——, the night is darker now " (John Mason Neale) (4).

25 150 are at Cambridge (5).

26 Drop a penny in the deer track (4).

29 I've a net, making for simplicity (7).

30 Ailment would make a boa glum (7).

31 Strongholds on the Rhine (6, 7).

Down

2 The officer's an accountant here (7).

3 An airborne prank (4).

4 Wangled a little music (7).

5 They take silk from these (7).

6 Weedy weight (4).

7 Horatio ! No speechifying in here (7).

8 Grassland dies—making a cos costume ? (5-8).

9 Lagging after a conviction (13).

15 One of the more bearable sins (5).

16 A room that is almost amusing brown (5).

20 Is it the track of a doodle-bug ? (7).

21 Irish college girl, perhaps ? (7).

22 Caesar's mother (7).

23 Hamlet as an evil lag (7).

27 Short wave in a football pool ? (4).

28 Neglect to give it the Order of Merit (4).

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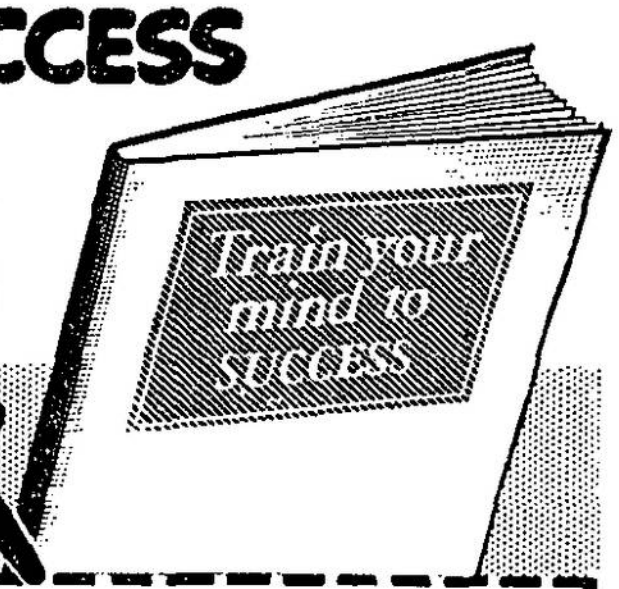

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